

Winter 1987 Vol. 20/no. 3

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*the magazine of the Royal Ontario Museum*



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**Dressing  
defensively**

**Why did the  
Vikings leave?**

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## There's no place like home

In this issue of *Rotunda* we talk about privacy, festivity, respecting one's parents, misfortunes of the Vikings, and dressing defensively. Our cover photograph, shot in 1907, is of Huron Street, Toronto. The north end of this street extends through a neighbourhood known as the Annex, where many of the houses still look much the same as the one in the photo. I live not five minutes by foot from the Annex part of Huron Street and in the summer, a flourishing street life is still a familiar sight. Yet this neighbourhood is rapidly changing.

Five minutes' walk in the opposite direction takes me to the stately renovated houses of Madison Avenue and Admiral Road—restored inner-city Georgian and Victorian elegance—where there is rarely a soul to be seen. My street falls somewhere between these extremes; the neighbours living in adjoining houses speak briefly to each other, should they meet casually in front of their homes. Mostly we keep to ourselves, however, spending time in our back rather than front yards, and avoiding the anonymous dwellers in the decaying high rises nearby. As John McIntyre points out, privacy is an important concern to us all, but the definition of the perfect mix of private and public places varies greatly according to one's financial situation, social background, and family ties.

Sometimes we may wish to withdraw into our own private and familiar worlds because everything around us appears to be changing so quickly that we feel as though we are losing our bearings. Consistency, like privacy, can be very reassuring. Festive traditions often provide the much needed constants in our lives, but even these seem less than predictable at times. Carole Carpenter looks at the value of festive traditions, focusing on Christmas as a festival that has neither changed nor lost its meaning as some of us would believe.

It is a tradition and a virtue in western and eastern cultures to show respect for one's parents. Confucius made very clear the importance he placed on filial piety. The ROM owns a rare set of ceramic tiles, each illustrating a story about one of the twenty-four paragons of filial piety whom he described, and Catherine Pagani tells us about the tales on four of them.

On a more exploratory note, Robert McGhee writes about the Vikings who first visited North America in A.D. 1000, almost five hundred years before Columbus. Unlike the Spanish, British, and French who followed, the Vikings decided that territorial conquest of our continent was not worth the often fatal confrontations with the hostile native populations; this in spite of their rather meagre situation as colonists of Greenland, living in the most spartan of European settlements. In fact, what we now believe to have been approximately five centuries of sporadic trade and attempts to establish North American settlements are hardly mentioned in Norse historical literature. New archaeological evidence is providing a more accurate and fascinating picture of what really took place.

The Vikings would certainly have had an advantage over their opposition if they had been better outfitted for battle. Nowadays when the battle is on the playing field and track, the equipment worn by modern athletes from football and hockey players to moto-cross racers bears more than a passing resemblance to Renaissance battle and tournament armour, and as Corey Keeble explains, for very good reasons. After all, the armour and sports equipment provide common solutions to the common problems of how to offer the maximum protection while allowing the wearer the greatest possible freedom of movement.

Sometime over the holiday season, in the privacy of your own home, or in a more public setting if you please, we hope that you enjoy reading this issue of *Rotunda*.

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# ROTUNDA

*the magazine of the Royal Ontario Museum*

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The William James family and their neighbours of  
Huron Street, Toronto, in 1907. Did they lack privacy?  
For the whole story, turn to page 30. Photo courtesy  
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## Letters to the Editor

### An issue out of the ordinary

The summer 1987 issue of *Rotunda* (Vol.20, no.1) was a delightful surprise.

Without losing any of the familiar themes, you added two most unusual articles in the essay by Harold Town and the short story by Timothy Findley. I particularly enjoyed Harold Town's evocation of Charles Currelly and of the Museum's patient education of all of us over the years.

I look forward to occasionally seeing similar articles in the future.

M. ANNE FOSTER  
CANADA LAW BOOK  
AURORA, ONTARIO

### Curators: coelacanth enemy number one?

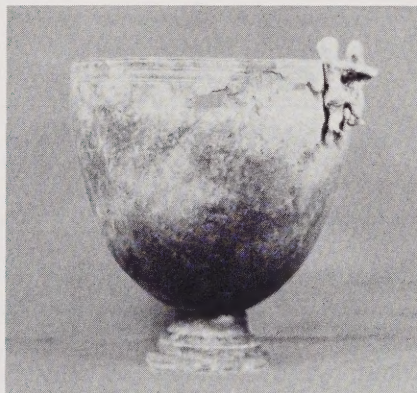
It was with great distress that I read about coelacanths being caught at a rate of about ten per year for museums ("The coelacanth: a real fish tale," Vol. 20, no. 2). Surely you do not have to be a scientist or a member of the museum society to foresee the future extinction of this incredible, rare creature. Are museum curators really so greedy that their museum collections are more important to them than the continued existence of this rare species? Where in the depths of their scientific consciences do they find the right to pay money to encourage the fishing of the coelacanth?

The article states, "There is always a danger that man will finally make them extinct." I would suggest that it is not "man" in general at fault here but rather museum curators alone who can take the rap for this one!

ANNE C. PHILPOT  
MARMORA, ONTARIO

### Oops, we goofed

In the fall 1987 issue of *Rotunda* (Vol.20, no.2) we reproduced the wrong photograph at the end of the *Illuminations* article "Is that a helmet you're wearing?" by Susan Stock. The photograph on page 13 should have been the one that follows.



The questionable helmet has been reshaped as a vase.

While we basically agree with Ms Philpot's sentiment against the exploitation of coelacanths by curators, there are two points to be taken into account.

First, coelacanths were being caught by Comorans long before scientists knew of their existence. The fishermen were fishing for food fish, not coelacanths, but the coelacanths that were inadvertently caught provided a good source of lamp-oil. Releasing hooked coelacanths at the side of the boat would be an ineffective way to save them because the fish would almost certainly die of "the bends" (the blockage of the fish's blood vessels by nitrogen bubbles caused by the rapid decrease in atmospheric pressure as the fish are pulled to the surface).

Second, the letter suggests that fishermen have made a priority of catching coelacanths for sale to museums. This is most unlikely because the chances of catching one coelacanth are very slight and the fishermen still have to eat. Unfortunately there are no statistics to tell us if more coelacanths are now being



caught as a result of the high prices offered by museums.

Does a person who lives in comfortable surroundings have the right to deny an impecunious fisherman the opportunity to provide for his family by the exploitation of his own natural resources? This is a philosophical question for which we have no answer. We can only observe that throughout man's history, principles usually have been the luxury of privileged societies.

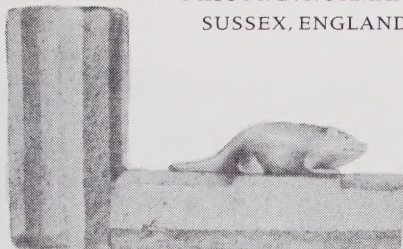
We can end on two encouraging notes. Most museums (including the ROM) have a coelacanth and have no need or wish to acquire any more, and the last two expeditions to the Comores have cabled ahead to inform the Comorans that they do not wish to buy a coelacanth. We join Ms Philpot in the devout wish that the magnificent creatures from the past will always be with us deep in the Comoran seas.

DR RICHARD WINTERBOTTOM  
CURATOR IN CHARGE  
MARY BURRIDGE-SMITH  
CURATORIAL ASSISTANT  
DEPT OF ICHTHYOLOGY AND  
HERPETOLOGY, ROM

### Bringing a little of Toronto's prehistory to England

I was very pleased to receive the spring 1987 issue of *Rotunda* (Vol.19, no.4). I was especially interested in the article "Toronto Life in the Past Lanes," which I found quite engrossing.

MISS M. D. NORMAN  
SUSSEX, ENGLAND



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## A VISION OF LIFE AS IT SHOULD BE

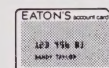


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## *Needed: a national policy on natural history*

With the exception of Canada, all developed countries have comprehensive national policies for the preservation and study of their natural history heritage. Even most Third World countries have such policies. Though in managing our natural heritage, our federal government has established certain practices that are implemented by Parks Canada and other organizations, these are by no means comprehensive in their scope. For example, the collecting, research, and public information activities of our museums are not covered by any federal directives. In fact, museum-based research in natural history is actually discouraged. Let me explain.

Over the past two or three decades, a split has developed in the study of the biological sciences as museums and universities have become more specialized in the areas of research that they wish to pursue. Except for entomologists, very few university-based biologists in Canada study taxonomy, the fundamental principles applied in classifying animals and plants. To a very large extent, this kind of basic research is conducted only in museums. Nevertheless, taxonomic study forms an important part of the foundation for university research,

Fish specimens in the ROM collections, caught before our water systems became polluted, can be used as a base line for measuring the amount of toxic substances in the fish now living in our streams and lakes.

in such esoteric areas of biology as ecology and genetics.

In other words, museums tend to focus their research on the physical characteristics of the natural world, while universities specialize in the study of how this world works. Because there is no comprehensive national policy governing natural history research, the federal government is free to make the arbitrary decision not to fund museum research; and because it is museum research that provides the foundation for all biological research, a lack of funding means that the foundation can be neither expanded nor strengthened. As Alan Emery, director of the National Museum of Natural Sciences has stated, the federal government is prepared to finance research that has as its aim the development of grand hypotheses and theories about the living world of nature, though perhaps only half of the plants and animals that make up this world have been discovered, collected, studied, and classified.

Emery also has been drawing attention to the present state of the largest entomological collection in Canada, which once belonged to the National Museum of Natural Sciences but is now under the jurisdiction of Agriculture Canada

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## ILLUMINATIONS

(formerly the Department of Agriculture). When the Parliament building burned down in 1916, the collection was moved out of the museum in order to give the legislature a place to meet while a new building was being constructed. Although the entomological collection continued to be under the control of the museum curators until after the Second World War, it was then made the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture.

From that time, almost all the collecting of insects has been carried out in support of the purely practical responsibilities of Agriculture Canada. No museological research is being conducted, and even the maintenance of the collection is not assured, because there is no relevant federal plan. Hypothetically a bureaucrat could decide that there is no reason to preserve those parts of the collection that have no immediate and clear practical use for agricultural research.

Though such a move may seem unlikely, it is a fact that a large part of the National Fisheries Board collections was destroyed as a result of a bureaucratic decision. Furthermore several important private insect collections in Canada will probably be bequeathed to museums either in Britain or in the United States. Major collectors of insects—and they are numerous—will not run the risk of leaving their collections in Canada under the present circumstances. A proper federal policy on our natural history heritage would ensure that Agriculture Canada's important collection of insects was curated and developed in a way beneficial to all researchers, and this would increase the likelihood that private collections would remain in Canada.

The study and preservation of biological specimens have practical applications beyond the improvement of our basic knowledge of the world around us. In fact the fish collections at the ROM have had a great practical value. Fish that were collected before our water systems became polluted can be used as a base line against which to measure

the amount of toxic substances in the fish now living in our streams and lakes. Although the early collections were not gathered with such applications in mind—after all, no one then had even heard of acid rain—their value, and that of other natural history collections, continues to increase as scientists discover new ways in which they can be used. Federal funds to help develop this important collection were available only because ROM curators were cross-appointed to the University of Toronto.

There is obviously a crucial need for a federal policy on the preservation and study of our natural heritage; fortunately, there is now a possibility that such a policy will come about. On 19 and 20 March 1987, a workshop entitled "Science and Technology in Canadian Museums: A Neglected Heritage?" sponsored by the Science Council of Canada was held in Hull, Quebec.

Dr Ed Crossman, curator of ichthyology at the ROM, spoke about the problems that museum scientists face in their efforts to obtain funding for the research of our natural history from a federal government unwilling to accept its proper responsibility in this area. Leslie Patten of the ROM's Exhibit Design Services discussed the ways in which galleries and special exhibitions are used to explain to the public what we know about natural history. I spoke briefly about the need for governments to assess the accomplishments of the museums that they subsidize in terms of the quality of visitors' experiences and museum research rather than simply by the annual number of visitors.

The workshop was a first step in the right direction. I hope that the Science Council of Canada will now support the results of our discussions by incorporating them into a draft plan of action for recommendation to the Government of Canada. In due time we will have a national policy and then in this respect Canada will have caught up to the rest of the world.

T. CUYLER YOUNG, JR



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## The lure of gold

Saffron is the most expensive spice in the world, yet even while we boggle at the cost of a pinch-sized packet we can't claim that it's worth its weight in gold. That would put it at more than \$7000 a pound, while saffron actually weighs in at about \$1000 retail, depending on market fluctuations. As for turmeric, the other golden spice that's sometimes mistaken for saffron, it's way down the list, at \$4.00 or so, company to such homely garden herbs as sage and parsley.

Despite the dramatic price difference, saffron and turmeric do have certain attributes in common. Both produce brilliant yellow dyes that have been admired in foods and fabrics, and even as cosmetics, for as long as humans have thought to harvest the resources of jungle and plain. And both add a distinctive flavour when used in cooking. But there the similarities end. The two spices come from completely different plants, and that goes a long way to explain their relative values. All gold is not created equal.

Turmeric is far easier to produce than saffron. Widely cultivated in Indo-Malaysia, *Curcuma longa* (or *domestica*, as one source has it) thrives without difficulty, given tropical heat, rich soil, and sufficient moisture. It is a member of the ginger family, with very similar underground stems or rhizomes, and so at harvest time it is only necessary to dig up the rhizomes, clean them, scald or boil them, and then dry them in the sun. The knobbly dried stems, bright orange inside, are either sold as they are or ground to a powder. Hard work, to be sure, especially in early days before mechanization speeded the various processes. Still it's nothing compared to the arduous task of producing saffron.

It's not that *Crocus sativus* is an especially demanding crop. A native of Asia Minor, it now grows in scattered locations throughout Mediterranean Europe, as well as in northern India and China. For several centuries, off and on, it



GLORIA VARLEY

The rather colourless turmeric rhizomes are quite a contrast to the golden powdered turmeric and rich red threads of Spanish saffron.

was even grown commercially in England. Today the world's major producer is Spain. On the vast ochre-coloured plains of La Mancha, saffron has found its home. Flourishing in hot sunny conditions, on clay soils rich in quartz, gypsum, and lime, it benefits from irrigation but can also be produced quite satisfactorily by dry-farming methods. It is the method of harvesting saffron that makes the costly difference. Modern technology may one day invade the routine, but for now saffron is plucked and processed on family farms in the traditional way.

The work starts around mid-October when the rosy purple flowers begin to bloom. They open at night, and by dawn have transformed the landscape into a vivid violet sea. Picking must begin at daybreak before the wind or pollen-seeking insects ruin the crop. Gathering the saffron rose, as it's called, is backbreaking work. Buds are pinched off with one hand and deposited in a basket slung over the other arm. These in turn are emptied into trucks or carts and carried back to the village.

The women and children and, at the most urgent times, even those normally too old or too rich to work in the fields, are waiting. Swiftly they strip the flowers of their three brilliant red stigmas, discarding the petals, which soon form a billow of colour on the floor. Each lot must be finished on the day it is picked,

so when bloom is at its peak the work may carry on well into the night. Once plucked, the stigmas are collected in flat sieves and carefully roasted on metal plates heated by butane. The air fills with saffron's curious fragrance—earthy, faintly musty, mysterious, intoxicatingly pungent to visitors, but scarcely noticed by the people who work in it all day long. The number of flowers needed to make one pound of dried saffron is given variously in figures that range from 85 000 to 250 000. (Perhaps the real wonder is that anyone has the time, or energy, to count.)

Naturally, anything that is so difficult to produce and yet so much in demand is a target for crooks and tricksters. If powdered saffron is cheap, you can bet it has precious little of the precious plant in its makeup. Instead there may be turmeric, safflower blossoms, calendula petals, or arnica. (The first three are perfectly respectable flavourings in their own right and don't deserve the ignominy of being forced to masquerade as something else. The latter is treacherous, for even though it has medicinal properties, it can be toxic when used carelessly.) In the modern world, such adulteration and misrepresentation will probably gain its practitioner a sharp rebuke and possibly a fine. In 15th-century Germany things were different; culprits could be burned or buried alive, so serious was the crime.





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## — ILLUMINATIONS —

Throughout history, humans have used various cultural distinctions to emphasize their actual or hoped-for superiority. One such distinction is the ability to indulge themselves by conspicuous consumption, which leads them to demand foodstuffs that are expensive and hard to come by. Saffron has consistently filled the bill. For a time, in 13th-century England, the clove was saffron's closest rival in the price wars, surpassing even pepper. Nowadays cardamom and true vanilla hold that distinction. Yet saffron always seems to win. Even in countries where it is frequently used as an ingredient, it is guarded, savoured, and rarely used with abandon unless the occasion requires a truly dazzling impression. Fortunately it takes very little saffron to scent a bouillabaisse or to colour a risotto or paella. Too much, in fact, makes for bitterness, not bliss. Saffron can't be treated as casually as its former rival, the clove, which is wantonly spiked into just about every baked ham or pickled peach that crosses Canadian tables.

Another thing. Cloves, and just about every other spice, deteriorate with age. (Turmeric's warm aromatic flavour, for example, vanishes fast if the spice is exposed to light.) Not saffron, if one Spanish author is to be believed. Stored safe from extremes of heat and cold and especially dampness, it "never spoils." It offers "general acceptance, stable price, durability, high value in relation to size, and easy divisibility." Small wonder farmers don't always sell all their harvest but keep some to guard against the proverbial rainy day.

Will this treasure trove be lost if technological advances, still largely in the experimental stage, make saffron as easy to harvest as wheat or grapes? Will computerized saffron farms one day amaze us with all the modern marvels now possessed by computerized wineries? It's possible. But in the meantime, saffron remains just as good as gold.

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## A fight for life in the vineyard

Just over a century ago, vineyards the world over were attacked by phylloxera, tiny burrowing parasites of the *Aphididae* family, which are almost imperceptible to the human eye. This louse has aptly earned the name *vasatrix* or ravager, for over the course of ten years, beginning in the 1860s, it very nearly wiped out the vineyards of Europe.

The introduction of the pest to the European vineyards was accidental. In the mid 19th century, while searching for a cure for oidium rot (downy mildew), another plague of the vineyard, British and French horticulturalists imported labrusca vines from the eastern seaboard of the United States. Unfortunately the researchers failed to notice that the roots of the imported vines were infested with the dreaded *Phylloxera vasatrix* aphid. The larvae of this louse feed off the roots of the vines, gradually sapping the flow of nutrients to the plants, and thereby killing them. Because the American vines were resistant to phylloxera they were not damaged, but the European vines, *Vitis vinifera*, were not resistant and they were devastated, with dire and far-reaching consequences.

The vineyards of France were the first to be affected, in the early 1860s. By 1870 the insect had been found in Bordeaux and the Rhône valley. It then spread to the Burgundy and Champagne regions. The vineyards of Portugal were the next to be struck, and over the following twenty-five years phylloxera spread ruthlessly through Germany, Italy, and Spain. By the end of the century very few vineyards in Europe remained untouched. During this time, phylloxera was also found in Algeria, South Africa, and parts of Australia.

In the aftermath of the phylloxera scourge, the acreage throughout Europe devoted to vineyards, such as the island of Madeira and the Côte Chalonnaise of Burgundy, was greatly and permanently reduced.



This luscious bunch of grapes from a French vineyard has grown from root-stock resistant to the nefarious phylloxera louse.

Some portions of vineyards in the Tarragona district of Catalonia in Spain were never replanted. The land was converted to mixed agriculture and almond tree cultivation.

Dozens of experiments were undertaken to save the vines, all to no avail. Vines were uprooted and left fallow for years. Concentrated arsenic solution was sprayed over the ground; this not only failed to kill the phylloxera louse but penetrated the water table, harming the health of humans and livestock. Soil was injected with carbon bisulphide, which proved to be highly flammable and toxic. Vineyards were even

flooded in an attempt to drown the louse, a practice that resulted not only in watering down the wine produced but also in spreading the pest from one vineyard to the next.

Finally it was discovered that the only solution was to graft *Vitis vinifera* plants onto resistant American root-stock. Before grafting, in order to cleanse the vineyard of the phylloxera louse, the vines had to be uprooted and the soil sterilized. Grafting is now standard procedure in most of the world's vineyards. It can take place either directly in the vineyard or in a nursery, depending on the clemency of the regional climate. Today, a variety of

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phylloxera-resistant root-stocks are cultivated in nurseries throughout the world.

There are a few places in the world where *Vitis vinifera* has grown unaffected by the phylloxera louse. Vineyards in the Colares region of Portugal have escaped the plague because the vines are rooted in fertile clay soil that lies under a thick layer of sandy soil, often nine metres deep; phylloxera cannot penetrate the sandy topsoil. (However, the vineyards are now rapidly losing ground to the ever-growing demands for holiday cottages by local residents and the well-to-do of nearby Lisbon.) Similarly, part of Germany's Mosel region remains free of this pest because of the slate soil, which impedes the louse's penetration to the roots of the vines. Though all of northern Greece was affected, some parts of southern Greece, including the islands of Corfu and Crete, still remain free from the pest.

So far, Chile has also been spared, isolated as it is by the high Andes mountains to the east, the arid Atacama Desert to the north, and the cold Humboldt current along the Pacific Coast. For reasons still unknown, in Australia only the region of Victoria, once the most productive wine-producing area, was struck by phylloxera. Subsequently, many vineyards in Victoria were sold for real estate development.

It remains to be seen whether or not the vineyards of Chile and the unaffected wine-growing regions of Australia will succumb to the pest. In any remaining phylloxera-free vineyards of Germany, traditional vines are gradually being replaced with American root-stock and grafting. "The risk is too great," says Helmut Jung of the German Wine Academy, "and enough research has been conducted on grafted root-stock to make the difference in quality of the final product virtually non-existent."

The phylloxera epidemic created some opportunities as well as losses. In areas not immediately struck by the louse, vintners were able to

profit from the acute shortages of wine elsewhere by selling their own wines at premium prices. Italian winemakers in Piedmont were quick to take advantage of the situation. In the process of replanting their vineyards with American root-stock they replaced their bonarda vines with graftings of barbera and freisa varieties, thereby responding to the then market demand for sturdier, fuller wines.

The Rioja wines of northern Spain are very much like Bordeaux wines, and with good reason. When phylloxera struck the Bordeaux vineyards, the fame of Rioja wines and the proximity of the region to Bordeaux lured many Bordeaux vintners across the Pyrenees to settle in Logroño and Haro. With them they brought their winemaking techniques. They also introduced the Bordeaux-shaped bottle, a mark of quality for Rioja wines, and the classic 225-litre oak-wood barrel that has become a standard size used for maturation of Rioja wines. The oak-wood imparts the fullness and pleasant, vanilla-like flavour to the Rioja wines.

However, the fact remains that where phylloxera has struck it has been disastrous for everyone concerned, from wine growers to wine lovers. The restoration of France's vineyards is estimated to have cost over 1800 million francs, and the traditional structure of the European vineyards has been completely altered. Phylloxera cannot be eradicated. It remains a constant threat to the vintner. Each successive replanting must be preceded by a thorough disinfecting of the vineyard soil, and there is a three-year incubation period before the new vines are strongly rooted. Beyond that is the constant need for surveillance of the vines to ensure their health and vitality. So the next time you raise a glass of wine, proffer a toast to the fortitude and perseverance of scientists, vintners, and wine merchants throughout the world who continue to wage war against one of nature's most insidious pests.

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## Has your lacquer lost its lustre?

Lacquer is so durable that pieces of oriental lacquerware have survived more than a thousand years of burial. It is resistant to water, acid and bases, and most solvents, and for this reason lacquer is a popular finish for food containers, furniture, and decorative objects.

Such being its nature, it was surprising to find, during the conservation of several lacquerwares at the ROM, that the surfaces readily dissolved in ordinary water, and that the colouring came off onto cleaning swabs. Close examination of these artifacts revealed that the soluble areas were also dull and faded as a result of too much exposure to light.

In order to determine whether it was the light that also caused the surface to become soluble, several Japanese and Chinese lacquers were collected and tested by swabbing them with different solvents such as water and ethanol. Those surfaces that proved to be completely insoluble were exposed to ultraviolet light. After only one week of this accelerated aging, all samples were retested for solubility. Although the appearance of some of the samples had not changed, all the lacquer surfaces exposed to the ultraviolet light had now become soluble.

To protect the lacquerware in the ROM collections, objects are now stored in the dark and displayed at a light level of fifty lux. In your home, oriental lacquerwares should be kept away from windows and out of direct sunlight, the strongest and most damaging form of light. They should also be kept away from the vicinity of fluorescent lamps that do not have ultraviolet filters.

Since light damage occurs before there is a visible change to the lacquer surface, precautions should be taken against secondary damage from water and other solvents with all lacquerware. Water or alcohol spilt on light-damaged lacquer surfaces will leave marks. Gloves should be worn when handling lacquers because fingerprints can etch into a degraded surface much as they do on silver, and the prints become impossible to remove without causing more damage to the finish. Ordinary dirt can be cleaned away with mineral spirits from surfaces that do not come into contact with food.

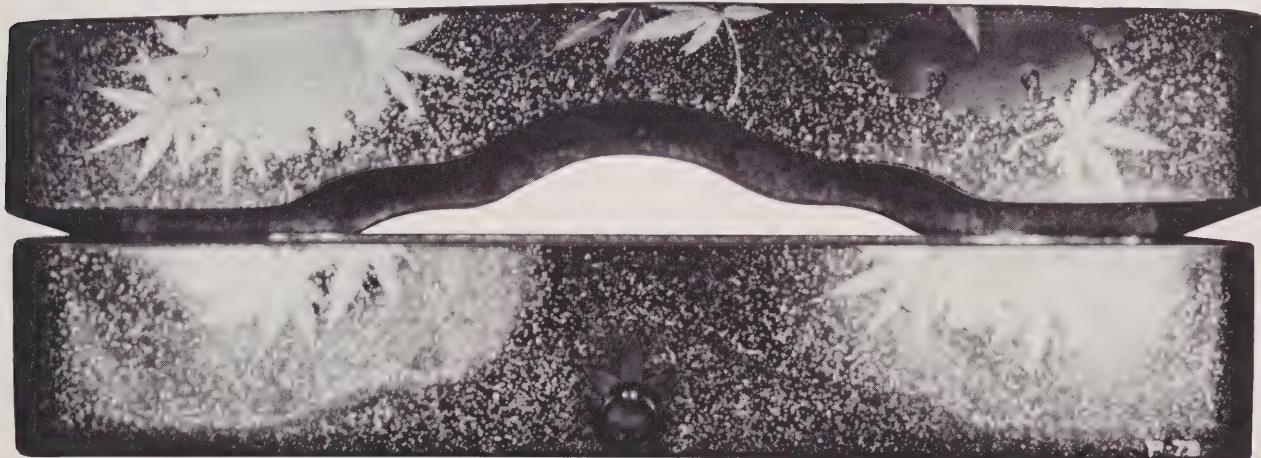
Lacquer is also inflexible. When it is applied to a base object made of wood or another organic material that shrinks and swells with changes in the relative humidity, the lacquer cannot accommodate these changes. As a result it may separate from the base, tent up, or flake off. A constant relative humidity of fifty per cent is ideal to prevent the core from moving.

Lacquerware from China, Japan, Korea, and other countries of the Far East is made from the sap of the tree *Rhus vernicifera*, a relation of the poison sumac. Raw lacquer is harvested in the summer months, after which it is exposed to air and filtered to remove impurities. Applied in thin coats to a base object, lacquer hardens under humid conditions to a glossy coating of great beauty as well as durability. A particular decorative finish may require as few as ten to as many as three hundred coats. Since each coat must first be hardened in a specially prepared chamber for more than twenty-four hours, and then ground and polished before the next one is applied, the production of a single item may take up to a year. Lacquer lends itself very well to a number of decorative techniques: carving, layering, and painting; it may also be combined with other materials such as mother of pearl and gold powders.

The West discovered and became fascinated with lacquer when the East opened its doors to European trade in the 16th and 17th centuries. From that time numerous attempts have been made to imitate its lustrous surface. Europeans developed japanning, a black coating that includes bitumen, lamp black, rosin, and solvents. More recently hundreds of plastic imitations have flooded the market. It can be difficult, even for an expert, to identify the real thing.

MARIANNE WEBB

The light damage on this box is easy to see from the darkened areas. These areas are probably now also water soluble.







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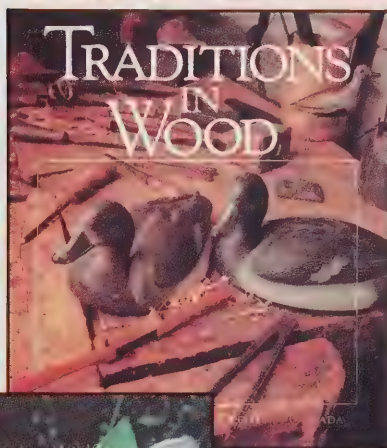


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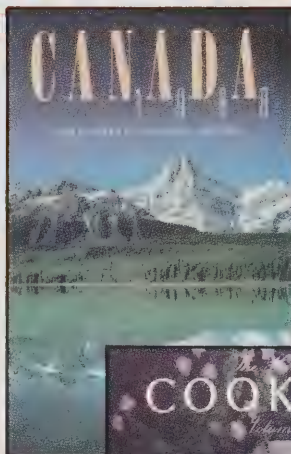
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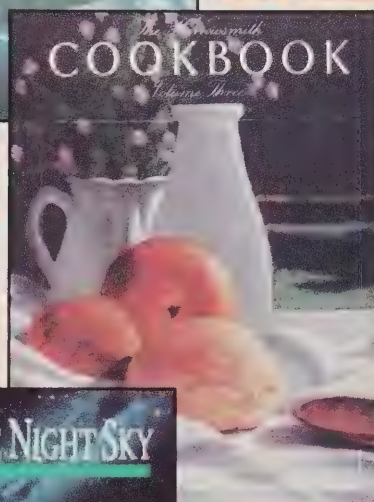


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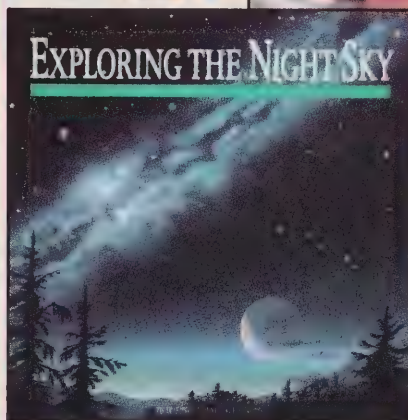


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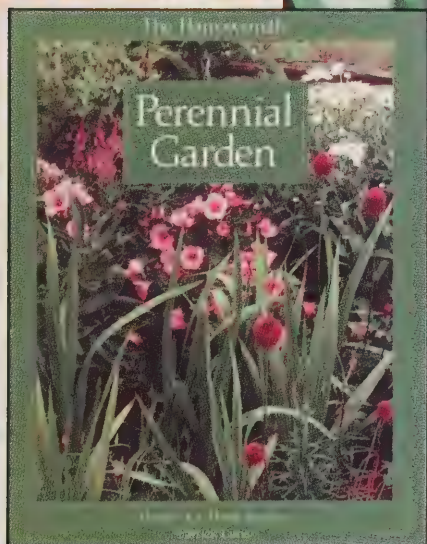
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# DRESSING DEFENSIVELY

*There are great similarities between the equipment of the golden age of armour and the modern age of sport.*

K. Corey Keeble



Helmet c. 1480, German, iron covered with leather and painted canvas. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The helmet would have been worn by a knight participating in a mock battle known as a *Kolbenturnier*. The grill-like face-guard looks much like those used for football and hockey helmets.

*Facing page:* Balancing on his motor-cycle, Stephen Legate of the National Ballet of Canada is a moto-cross racer in his spare time. David Meinke, wearing Italian jousting armour from the collections of the ROM, is also a dancer with the National Ballet of Canada. (However, he is not a knight in his spare time.) Bob Haggert is a student at York University and a casual hockey player. They are being eyed by one of the stone warriors from the Ming Tomb at the ROM.

THE tournament was the medieval and Renaissance parallel to modern sports events. Originally the tournament served as a training ground for warfare, and the armour and weapons used by its participants were essentially the same as those used on the actual field of battle. By the late Middle Ages, however, tournaments had evolved into highly specialized sports with their own forms of protective clothing and blunted weapons.

One popular tournament event during the 15th century was the *Kolbenturnier* or "baston course," a mock battle in which opposing groups of knights on horseback scored points by swinging wooden clubs to strike the ornaments on top of their rivals' helmets. While the *Kolbenturnier* looked somewhat like a feudal cavalry charge, it was an orderly ritual that emphasized the dexterity and riding skills of the participants. Every effort was made to outfit the riders in a way that would provide maximum protection against physical injury. As a misdirected swing of the wooden clubs could cause serious harm to the face, the large, padded iron helmets worn by the riders were fitted with special grill-like guards that were like those fitted to modern football and hockey helmets.

Although sports have changed over the centuries, there remains still in modern times the need to protect athletes against physical injury. Their clothing must permit maximum freedom of movement, but with ever-increasing frequency in our own era, the distinctive clothing for sports includes major safety features in its design. It must also help to create for the wearer a particular image, be it of team affiliation, strength, aggressiveness, or grace. Confronted with the problem of designing clothing to fulfil these requirements, it is not surprising that although centuries apart, the designers of 15th- and 16th-century steel armour and the designers of modern sports apparel have created clothing that is very similar in the basic principles of construction.

Moto-cross and hockey equipment are just two of the modern types of protective sports apparel with more than a passing resemblance in form and function to the specialized kinds of armour in use four and five hundred years ago. Plate armour of the 15th and 16th centuries was designed to afford the greatest possible degree of protection while allowing maximum mobility and freedom of movement. A complete suit or harness of European armour was one of the most remarkable technical achievements of the period. It was so perfectly articulated that it complemented the natural structures of the skeletal and muscular systems, thereby allowing the wearer to move with ease. The armour was also shaped to deflect the blows of virtually any weapon of that time.

Field armour, the armour actually used in battle, had to be light enough to enable the wearer to move rapidly and with ease. Yet some people still believe that plate armour was so heavy that a knight had to be lifted into his saddle with a crane. This is entirely inaccurate. Armour, above all, had to be practical in design, otherwise it would never have been worn. In some cases tournament armour was *heavier* than armour used in battle, but the great







**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS FOR THE PHOTOGRAPHS ON PAGES 25 TO 27.**  
*We would like to thank Cycle World, Islington, Ontario for lending us the moto-cross equipment, and CCM for lending us the hockey equipment. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and the Hockey Hall of Fame, Toronto kindly gave their permission to reproduce photographs of objects in their collections.*

*All photographs of sports equipment and armour from the ROM collections were shot by Bill Robertson. Photographs of armour from the Metropolitan Museum of Art were generously supplied by that institution.*

weight was a reflection of the special safety requirements of an evolved sport. While the construction of modern protective equipment for sports resembles in many respects the armour of earlier periods, the use of modern plastics and other synthetic materials in place of steel enables modern designers to devise complete protective systems of extremely light weight.

During the age of plate armour, a wide variety of mittens and fingered gauntlets was available to meet the special needs of the different types of battle and tournament conditions. Such specialization may be seen in modern sports apparel from the large, well-padded gloves worn by hockey players to the gloves worn by moto-cross riders, which are designed both for protection and to improve the wearer's grip.

Traditional plate armour provided flexibility in a fingered gauntlet by attaching overlapping scales of metal over the fingers of a textile or leather glove. For moto-cross gloves, flexibility is ensured by the application of thick leather or plastic strips over the finger stalls of the glove. Some hockey gloves have slablike articulations of material across the back of the hand, and similar flexible strips across the fingers.

The large padded defences reaching from the ankle to the thigh that are worn by hockey goalies can be compared to the special padding that protected the legs of the competitors in jousts, and, likewise, the large rectangular hand defences of hockey resemble the large gauntlets known as manifers that were also worn for special forms of joust.

Motorcycle riders mounted on their mechanical steeds face the same risks of leg injuries from falls and rapid travel over and around rocks, bushes, and other obstructions that the knight on horseback faced from the sweeping weapon cuts of the enemy in battle. (In fact, it was usually only the cavalry of the 15th and 16th centuries that was supplied with leg and foot armour for battle; infantry rarely, if ever, wore it.) While the boots of motorcyclists do not look like greaves and sabatons, the plastic ankle cups, steel toe caps, and heavy leather construction offer the same protection.

Jousting armour c. 1500, German. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This very dramatic armour is a special type created in the 15th century for jousts with blunted lances. It is different in appearance from either field or battle armour of the same period.







*Clockwise from upper left:* Jousting helmet c. 1570, German. Collection of the nom. The trapdoor on the visor is for air circulation. The central screw is for the attachment of a large reinforcing piece. These features distinguish this helmet from types used in warfare. Moto-cross helmet. The peak or fall over the face has been left off. The vents of the chin piece and the vents at the centre top are for air circulation.

Parade helmet in the shape of a grotesque mask, early 16th century, South German (Augsburg). Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Goalie mask, worn by Gilles Glatton in 1976, designed by Greg Harrison. Collection of the Hockey Hall of Fame.



*Centre:* A complete suit of jousting armour c. 1580–1590, German (Saxony). Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Weighing 45.5 kilos, the armour is designed to provide maximum protection to the wearer. Among its safety features is a brace attached to the helmet and backplate to provide protection against whiplash injury to the neck.

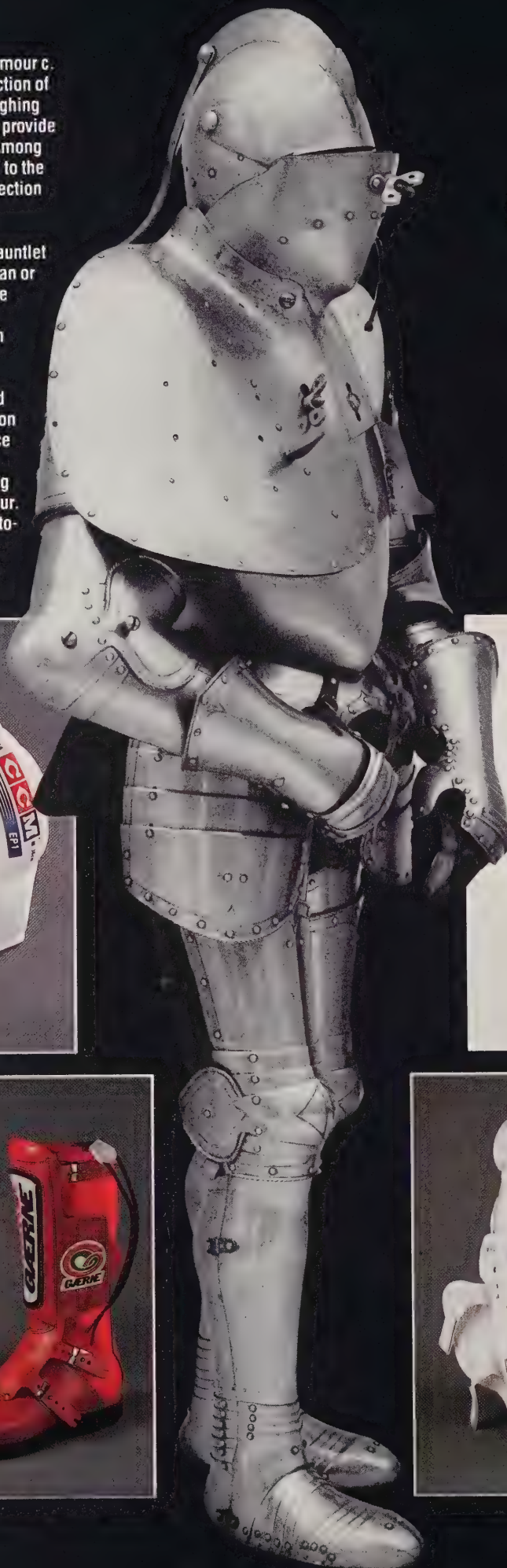
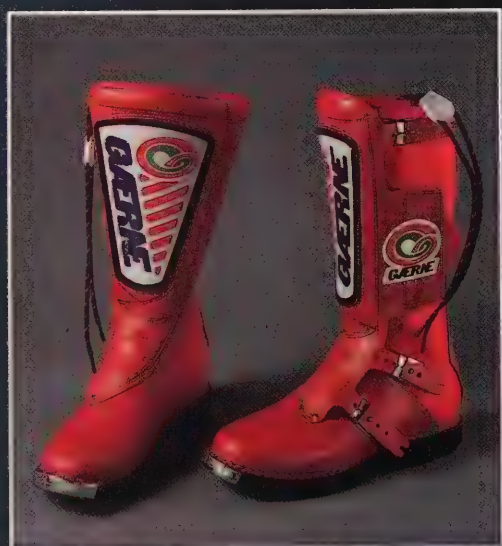
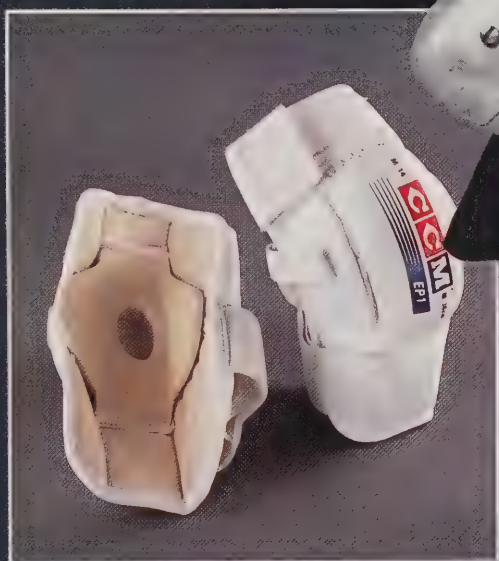
*Clockwise from upper right:* Elbow gauntlet for the left hand c. 1490, South German or Austrian (Innsbruck). Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

A pair of hockey gloves—leather with foam padding backed with polyethylene.

A pair of hockey shin pads—moulded poly with polyurethane and poly-cotton lining. They are similar in appearance and function to the poleyns (knee pieces) and greaves (closed lower leg sections) of Renaissance plate armour.

Leather steel-toed boots worn by motocross riders.

A pair of hockey elbow pads—nylon, cotton, and polyethylene.







*Clockwise from upper left:* Half armour c. 1570, northern Italian (Brescia). Collection of the rom. Originally made as an infantry armour, this outfit was later used for tournaments. The shoulder pieces or pauldrons are attached to the gorget or collar by leather straps. The breastplate and backplate are held together by straps over the shoulders and by a waistbelt.

Hockey chest protector and shoulder pads — high-density polyethylene with cotton facings and foam padding.

Moto-cross chest protector and shoulder guards. The fastening of the front and back panels at the waist is similar to systems used on 15th- and 16th-century plate armour. The attachment of the shoulder guards to the top part of the protector by a dome fastener is a modern version of the systems of straps or pins used for the armour.

Half armour c. 1510, northern Italian (Milan), weighs 9 kilos, etched and gilded surface. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The breastplate and backplate are attached by straps and a waistbelt. The pauldrons (shoulder pieces) are fitted over steel pins on the gorget (collar).



And, as already mentioned, the designs of modern helmets with visors or face-guards have their historical counterparts. The face-guards may take the form of a grill (a modern version of the *Kolbenturnier* helmet) or they may be curved plastic screens that either slip into place or are attached to the helmet by pivots or dome fasteners. Historical helmets also had pivots for their visors as well as arrangements of spring catches, hooks and eyes, and other devices for locking their visors in place.

However, it is in the recent development of protective wear for the torso that modern sports apparel recalls most obviously historic armour. Modern shoulder pads look like plastic gorgets and pauldrons. The methods of attaching the defences for the arms at the shoulders of modern hockey and moto-cross equipment parallel exactly the methods used for plate armour of the 15th and 16th centuries. Only the materials have changed. And the system of small horizontal openings for ventilation found in modern equipment may seem the latest refinement until one sees the same features in armour created around 1500—for example the half-armour of Emperor Maximilian I made by his court armourer Konrad Seusenhofer at Innsbruck. It is now preserved in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.

More than just technical principles are involved, however, for the design of modern sports equipment—sports armour, in effect—has in many instances produced the same kind of superb, sublime sculptural effects that are seen in the greatest works of the virtuoso armourers of the past. With both historic plate armour and modern sports armour, technology and art are combined to an extraordinary degree. Think of the elegant lines of baseball, football, hockey, and moto-cross helmets.

There are also comparisons to be made in the decoration of historical armour and modern sports armour. Because certain types of helmets worn during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance completely covered the faces of the wearers, a system of embellishments for the armour and shields was created as a means of identification. This constituted the art of heraldry. Furthermore, the concealment of the face gave the armour an important psychological function as a mask that could create an air of mystery; in effect it could project a new personality. Thus paradoxically, while a full suit of plate armour was designed to fit the wearer as perfectly as possible, it was also designed to create an image of the wearer that would inspire in the observer awe, wonder, or fear.

In the 16th century, some armours designed essentially for ceremonial occasions, such as pageants and parades, featured helmets with visors embossed to look like grotesque masks. Such helmets, worn in battle in the early 1600s, seem intentionally to have been made with visors suggestive of a death's head. Called *Todenkopf* helmets, they were obviously intimidating, which shows how a helmet could be used offensively as well as defensively in what may be thought of as an early form of psychological warfare.

Obvious examples of a modern-day application of decoration meant to intimidate the opposition can be found on the hockey goaltenders' masks designed by such well-known artists as Greg Harrison. They are the modern versions of the masterpieces made for the ruling members of the Hapsburg dynasty by the Helmschmied family of Augsburg, or for the Medici by the Negroli family of Milan. The hockey masks generally incorporate the team colours and insignia into a powerful, even threatening design.

A similar visual impact is achieved by the combination of helmet, goggles, and face-guard that is the typical headgear of moto-cross riders. This headgear looks like a modern version of an open helmet called a *burgonet* and a face-guard called a *buffe* that were favoured by light cavalry of the 16th century.

The appearance of our modern sporting heroes in their full complement of protective gear is like an image from the past, modified with the benefits of modern materials and modern technology. They are our knights in armour, and the armour that they wear is as fascinating, as technically ingenious, and as beautiful as the armour created during the golden age of European armour manufacture in the 15th and 16th centuries. ♣

K. Corey Keeble is associate curator  
in charge of the European  
Department, ROM.



Murray Costello, president of the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association, is wearing a ROM/Team Canada top. Photographed by John Reeves in the Bishop White Gallery, ROM.

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# Private Places

*How private do we really want our homes to be?*

John McIntyre

**M**OST people in Ontario, particularly those living in cities, regard their homes as private places. Many consider privacy in and around the home as a basic right. People may not always be able to achieve the degree of privacy that they would like, but it is something that they strive for. Recently, an advertisement for a luxury condominium project in Toronto touted privacy as our “most prized possession.” But is our definition of domestic privacy the same as it was for past generations?

Many Ontarians can trace their ancestry to Europe. A look at life in Europe before the 17th century reveals that there was little privacy for anyone. Most Europeans, even members of the upper classes, lived in only one or two rooms, which were probably crowded most of the time with people, animals, and possessions. Even bathing was a public affair. In many parts of Europe, until the late Middle Ages, the bathhouse was a community centre where people not only came to bathe but also to eat and drink, relax, and socialize.

Like the verandah, the front yard and the street were important extensions of the turn-of-the-century city home. The William James family and their neighbours of Huron Street, Toronto, posed for this picture around 1907.

30 ROTUNDA, WINTER 1987



CITY OF TORONTO ARCHIVES. WILLIAM JAMES COLLECTION









ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO, ERIC ARTHUR COLLECTION

The front door of the Georgian house often had no exterior doorknob. The owner would enter with his key, all others had to knock. This door was from the Cartwright house in Grafton, Ontario, built in the late 1790s.

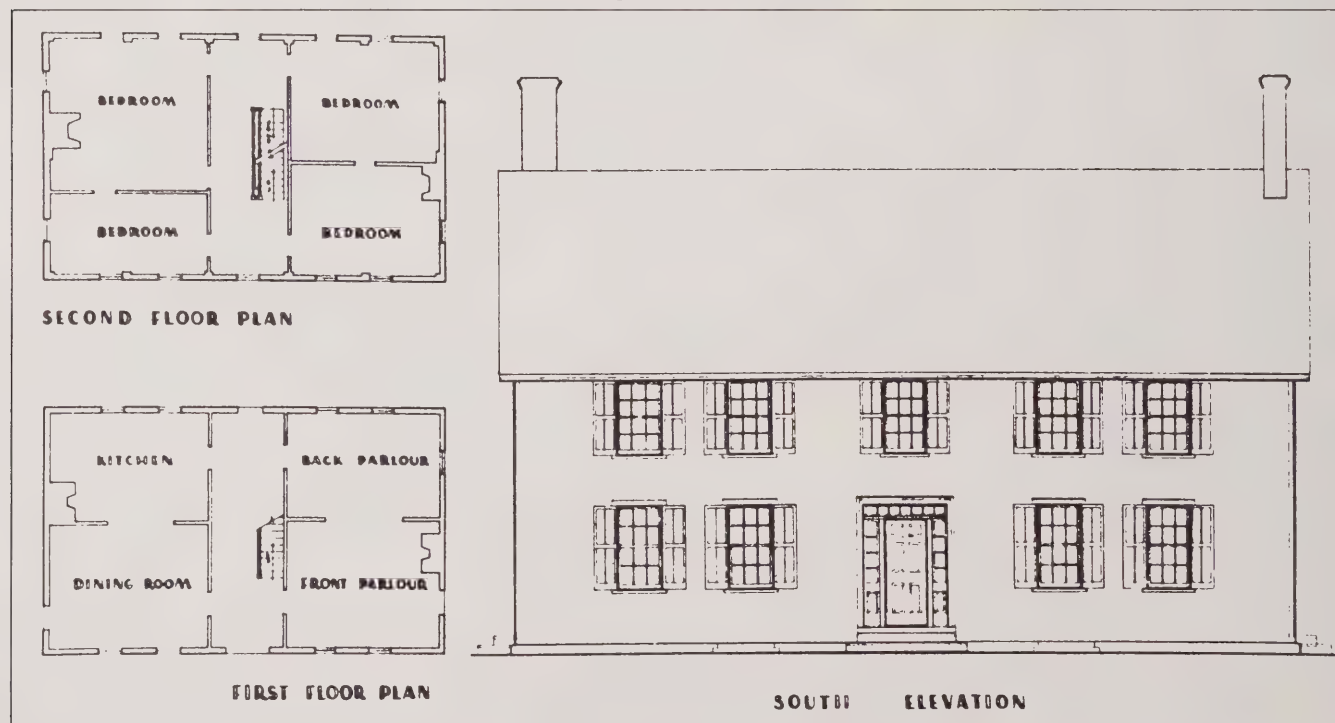
The Georgian floorplan featured a centre hall or passage that provided an intermediary space between the house's occupants and the world outside. Pictured here is the plan for the Cowan house, Windsor, Ontario, drawn by W. Kachmaryk. Collection of the Archives of Ontario.

In the 17th century, affluent western Europeans began to change their way of living. House designs were created that would ensure more privacy. The interior of the house was divided into public, semi-public, and private rooms that were connected by hallways and passages. People no longer had to walk through one room to reach the next.

The Georgian style of house in England and Ontario was characterized by a symmetrical plan of rooms opening off both sides of a central passage. Its design was more than a reflection of changing taste. The central passage permitted the screening of visitors before they were invited to enter the more private world of the residents. The design also kept servants at a distance from their employers.

The Georgian floorplan was the result of at least two major trends in European thought. First, the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation made individuals more introspective, a development which created a need for more privacy. The fact that nudity was considered a sin by both the Reformers and the Counter-Reformers also led to a greater need for privacy, as well as to the abandonment of all bathing except as medical treatment. The second major change was the rise of capitalism as an economic system; this tended to range members of society against one another. Of course, even in these changed circumstances not everyone demanded more privacy. There were many throughout Europe who were scarcely touched by the new ideas and new ways until well into the 19th century.

In the late 18th century, many people came to settle in Upper Canada. The majority of settlers were forced to live as their ancestors had done centuries before. Even as late as the 1850s, most lived in one- or two-room houses built of logs. Few settlers seem to have been bothered by the lack of privacy in such dwellings with the exception of those who had known different standards in Europe. Susanna Moodie, for example, was continually annoyed by her neighbours' assumption that they could use her household property at their convenience. The inns of Upper Canada were particularly upsetting to people of Mrs Moodie's social background. Quoting a fellow Briton in *Roughing It in the Bush*, Mrs Moodie wrote, "I thought to get a private room to wash and dress in, but there is no such thing as privacy in this country. In the bush, all things are in common; you cannot even get a bed without having to share it with a companion."



ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO



However, if you had enough money or high social standing, privacy was possible almost from the start. Lieutenant Governor and Mrs Simcoe spent their first months in Upper Canada living in a tent, but what an elaborate tent it was. On 28 November 1792, Mrs Simcoe recorded in her diary, "The partition was put in the canvas house today, by which means I have a bedroom in it as well as a sitting-room."

Later in the 19th century more and more Ontarians wanted privacy within the home. Perhaps domestic privacy became more desirable as neighbours moved closer, and more possible as subsistence farming gave way to more lucrative pursuits. But this also was a time when evangelical Protestantism made great gains and religious revivals brought about a new sense of orderliness and decorum. Protestant clergymen and members of their families wrote dozens of tracts, pamphlets, and books that expressed the new ideals of middle-class home life. The importance of the home as a distinctly private place was always stressed.

As the Industrial Revolution drew more people to towns and cities, the middle-class Victorian home in Britain and Ontario did indeed become a place set apart from the rest of the world. Whereas the home in the frontier days had been a centre for work, it was now a retreat from the working world. The man of the house left home each day to work in a factory or office, and the children left home to go to newly established public schools. The home became increasingly the domain of women charged with maintaining its privacy and sanctity. John H. Young, the American author of *Our Deportment*, stated: "Home is the woman's kingdom, and there she reigns supreme. To

Even as late as 1851, sixty years after the colony of Upper Canada had been established, fifty-seven per cent of the population lived in log houses. With only one or two rooms on the main floor and an undivided attic above, such houses could have provided little privacy for anyone. This house was located near Renfrew in the late 19th century.



PUBLIC ARCHIVES OF CANADA



embellish the home, to make happy the lives of her husband and the dear ones committed to her trust, is the honoured task which it is the wife's province to perform." *Our Department* was reprinted in Paris, Ontario, in 1883. Young's concern for the sanctity of the home and the woman's role within it owed much to Social Darwinism and to the popular writings of Herbert Spencer. Spencer's concern with the influences of environment and heredity on the creation of superior breeds of men and women did much to animate Victorian thinking about the home.

Such books vigorously promoted the home as an exceptionally private place. Young advised his readers that "all emotions, whether of grief or joy, should be subdued in public and only allowed full play in the privacy of your own apartments," and cautioned them, "Never enter a private room anywhere without knocking."

Floorplans of the houses of middle- and upper-class Victorians were designed to provide even more domestic privacy than had the Georgian house. Frequently they were asymmetrical, in that the entrance hall did not run directly through the house as did the Georgian passage. The furnishing of the entrance hall was quite standard: a rack for hats and coats, a table with a card receiver or tray, and a wooden chair or bench. These furnishings declared that the hall was clearly an intermediary space between the outside world and the private world within the home. No one would be expected to linger there for very long.

A back ell was constructed for servants. Frequently this area was a step or two below the level of the main house. Perhaps this was meant to signify the



ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO



lower status of servants, for often there was no practical reason for the difference of levels. The lower floor of the back ell contained the kitchen with its adjoining work and storage areas, a summer kitchen, and a woodshed. Even in quite modest houses, a separate staircase was built to link the ground-floor rooms of the back ell with the second floor so that the family and their hired help could stay out of each other's way. Pass-throughs and dumb waiters also protected the family's privacy. Doors and locks completed the scheme; every room had a door and every door had a lock.

From all these details about Victorian ideals and houseplans comes a rather grim picture of middle-class home life. Yet once the option of privacy was secured by rules and architecture, the Victorians opened their homes to the outside world with surprising freedom and regularity. Occasions that brought large numbers of relatives, neighbours, and friends into the Victorian home included weddings, christenings, and funerals. All of these are events that today would generally be held away from home. "At Home" days also brought many outsiders into Victorian houses. They were held at set times every month and announced by calling cards. Such cards might be used at other times to restrict or control access to the home.

Large, open verandahs, located at the front of the house, were furnished during the summer months, providing an outdoor living space often in full view of neighbours and the street. Verandahs were sociable places and, by all accounts, well and frequently used.

The Victorian period also had its theorists who spoke out for bold new forms of housing that would promote both privacy and sociability. In his novel



During the Victorian and Edwardian periods, the home was described as a retreat from the busy working world outside. Furthermore it was often referred to as the woman's sphere. In the parlour, women were supposed to display their talents through music, needlework, arranging bric-a-brac, and caring for plants—all activities intended to soothe their tired husbands and to inspire their children. The parlour had public uses as well, however, and provided the setting for "At Home" days, weddings, christenings, and funerals. In this picture we see Mr and Mrs Hutchison in their parlour, Port Perry, Ontario, c. 1910.



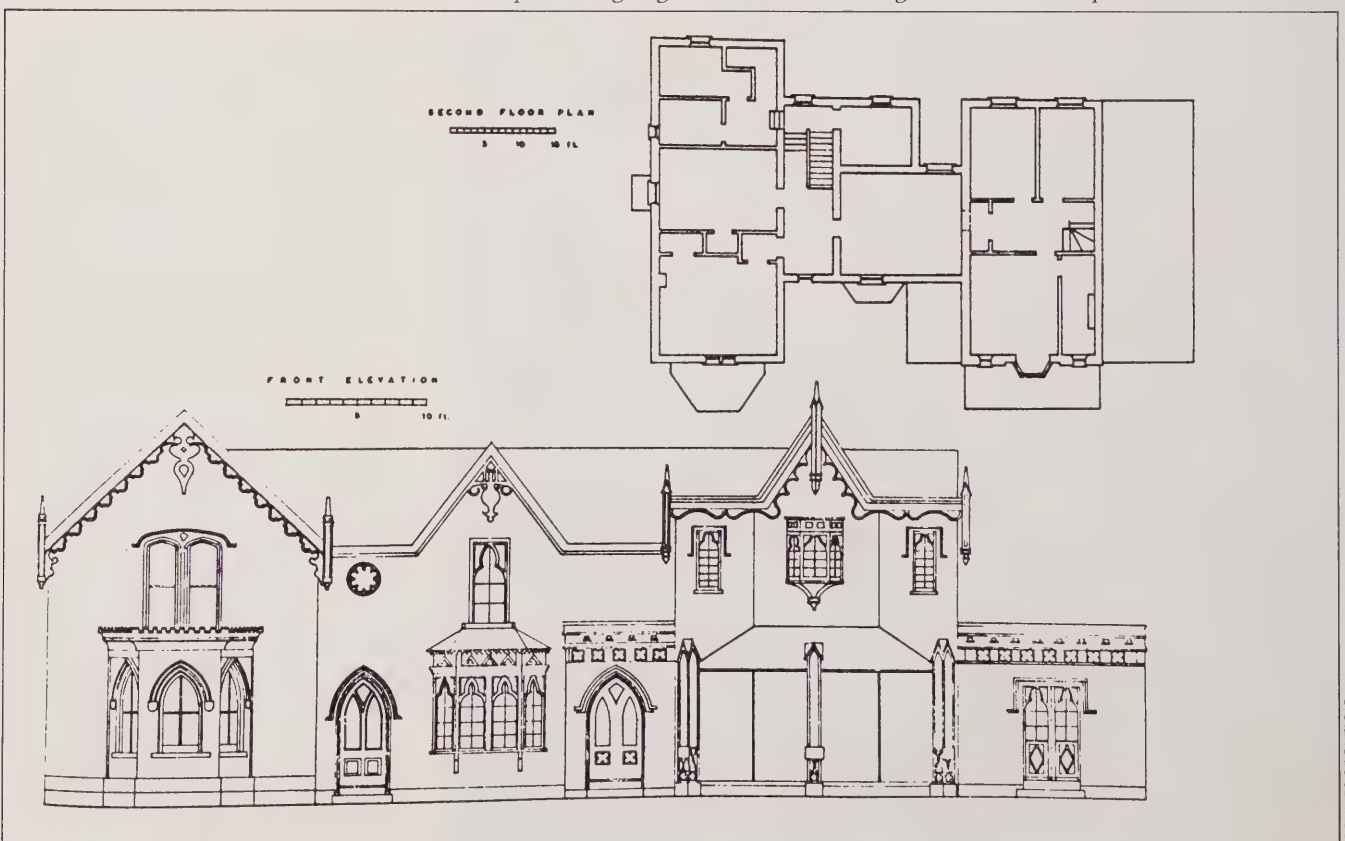
*Looking Backward*, Edward Bellamy described a utopian world that included spacious housing complexes complete with communal dining rooms and recreation areas. The novel, which was published in 1888, was a best-seller second only to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in popularity.

However, events of the early part of the 20th century provoked a widespread rejection of Victorian ideals. In the aftermath of the First World War many people came to believe that the Victorian era had been too competitive and too class-conscious, turning man against man as well as nation against nation. On a domestic level, the result of such thinking was the return to more open house plans, with fewer room divisions and, theoretically, fewer divisions between people. Formal entrance halls often were abolished entirely, so that visitors had direct access to the living-room, which now replaced the more formal parlour. Doors separating ground-floor rooms were removed. Pastel colour schemes linking room with room were chosen to give a light and open feeling.

But these open interiors came at the expense of closed exteriors. Gradually the front verandah was abandoned in favour of a patio or deck at the back of the house, often well out of sight of neighbours. Many Victorian verandahs fell into disuse, then into disrepair, and finally were removed entirely. Narrow porches, hardly big enough for two people to stand on, replaced verandahs at the entrance to the house. It became common practice to hold weddings, christenings, and funerals at churches or public facilities. "At Home" days gave way to coffee and cocktail parties with more closely determined guest lists. Personal calls were replaced by telephone calls. Ironically, middle-class homes became more private just as their interior plans became more open.

In modern houses, technology separates family members from one another more effectively than Victorian nooks and crannies, and locked doors. With central heating there is no need for family members to gather in one room for warmth. The kitchen fire and parlour stove, which had drawn families together during cold, inclement weather, are things of the past. Likewise, the family no longer gathers around a single kerosene lamp on a centre table in

The irregular floorplans of many Victorian houses potentially offered more privacy than the Georgian house. A back stairway and service wing separated the family from their hired help. This is a plan for Elizabeth Cottage, Kingston, Ontario. Collection of the Archives of Ontario.



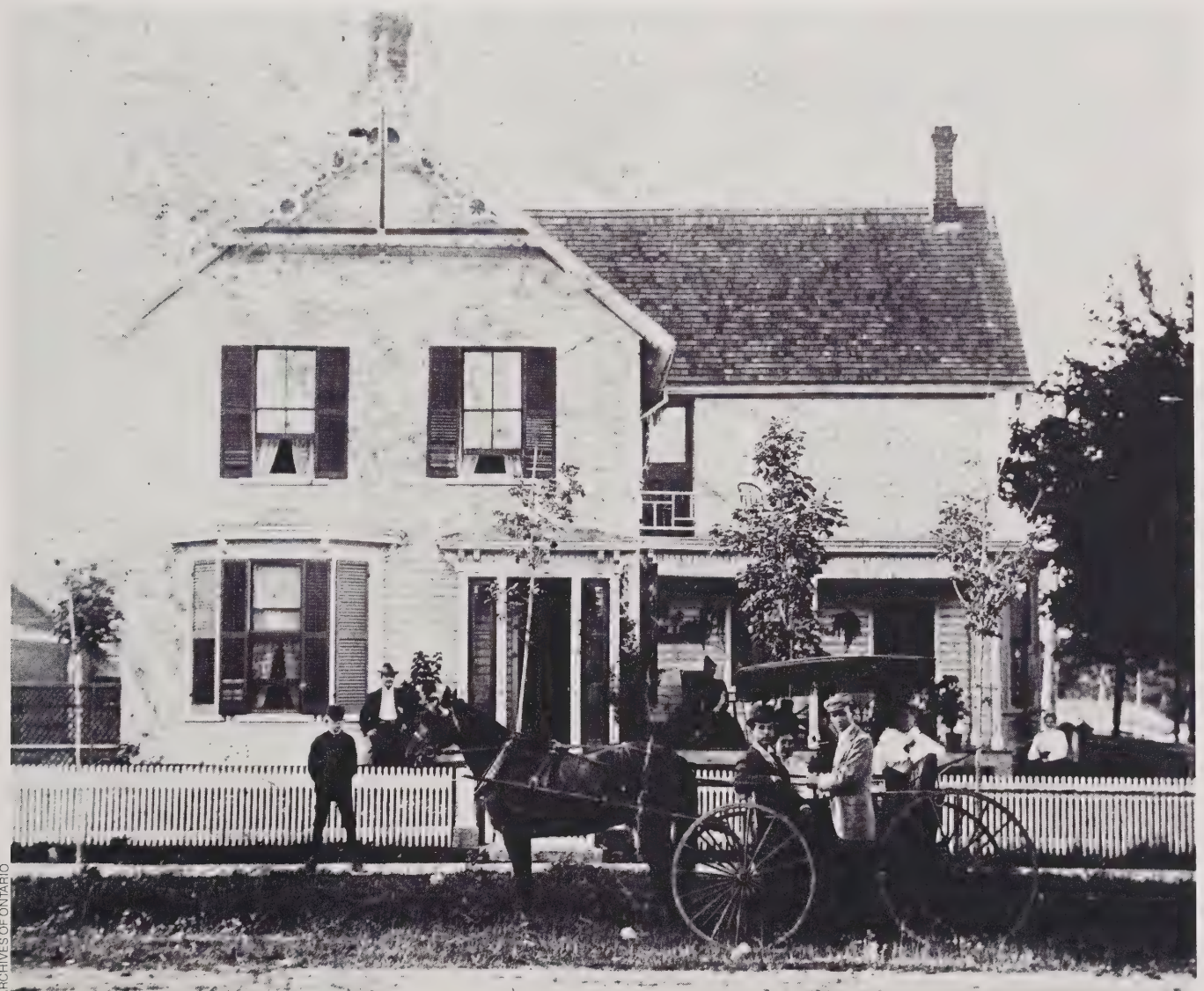


the Victorian parlour because electric lighting can be placed conveniently throughout the home. Well-equipped bathrooms have made it easy and comfortable to bathe frequently in privacy rather than occasionally in a metal tub by the kitchen fire.

Women, in particular, have found a new degree of privacy, and even of isolation, as a result of technological changes within the home. Electric appliances remove the need for servants and even part-time help in most middle-class houses. Electric refrigerators and freezers eliminate the need for daily marketing. A privately owned washing machine makes frequent visits to the corner laundry unnecessary, and dryers have put an end to the sociable practice of chatting with neighbours over the back fence while hanging out the wash.

Still, varying economic and cultural backgrounds have an important role to play in determining how and to what extent privacy will be sought. In many working-class neighbourhoods of Toronto, for example, houses still have front verandahs that are very much in use. Where Victorian verandahs have decayed and fallen down, they have been carefully replaced in wood, brick, iron, or angelstone. Front yards remain as focal points for family pride, with flower beds, rockeries, statuary, and fencing providing a colourful vista along the street. Perhaps the sociability that such neighbourhoods promote is an essential antidote to the impersonal qualities of the workplace.

While privacy was assured inside the Victorian home, the front verandah provided an important link between home and community. This is the McLennan residence in Gananoque, c. 1900.





The garage is the dominant feature of many modern suburban house fronts.



BRIAN BOYLE

In the more affluent suburbs, however, the front verandah (when it exists at all) and the front yard are seldom used. Inside, plans may be more open, with room flowing into room. But again, this opening up of the interior seems to have been accompanied by the closing down of the exterior. The garage takes up much of the front yard, and has gained the prominence once held by the verandah. By the late 1970s, it had become standard practice to project the garage from the front of the house, thus leaving more room at the back where one might expect the family to be. The projecting garage further separates neighbour from neighbour. With a connecting door from garage to house, family members may enter and leave their homes out of the view of their neighbours. On the other hand, the washing of the car in front of the garage is a common pastime and may even be considered as the modern setting for neighbourly chats.

Apartment and condominium dwellers live in even greater isolation than people in houses. Few enjoy the sort of generous public spaces envisioned by Edward Bellamy in 1888. And more and more often the inhabitants of these places are single, with family and friends in distant places. And of course the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s was also one of the many factors leading to a greater desire for privacy. Interestingly, what sociologists call the first sexual revolution took place just when the Georgian architectural style was becoming popular.

Despite the high cost of privacy today— isolation and substantial rents or mortgages—many people would be loath to give it up. There is comfort in knowing you *can* be alone. It may be good to get away from family and friends from time to time. Now that women as well as men are leaving the home to go to work, homes may be needed as refuges even more than in the Victorian era.

Looking back, we find that privacy is not the timeless human need that many of us think it is, but rather one that has been created in recent centuries as a response to social change. Georgian houses made privacy possible for the first time. Victorian houses allowed for even greater privacy, but still provided ample space for social occasions. Our own houses and apartments are built with so much emphasis on privacy, however, that they may be the exact antithesis of the homes of the first settlers in Upper Canada or the houses of Europeans before the 17th century. Whereas early homes offered no opportunities for privacy, ours offer few for neighbourliness. ♡

*Ontario at Home is a travelling exhibit produced by the Outreach Services Department, ROM., in cooperation with the Canadian Housing Design Council, and is on display at the ROM from 31 October 1987 until 3 January 1988. Major funding for the exhibit has been provided by the Museum Assistance Programmes of National Museums of Canada and the Ontario Heritage Foundation, an agency of the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture.*

*John McIntyre teaches social and architectural history at Seneca College in Toronto. He is academic advisor for Ontario at Home, a travelling exhibit produced by the Outreach Services Department, ROM.*



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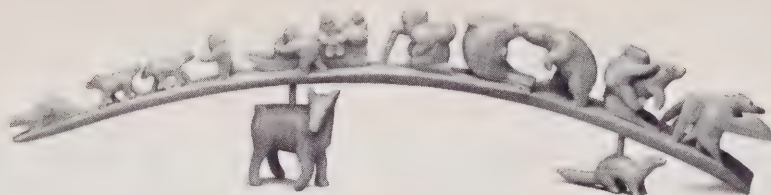
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## WHAT'S ON AT THE ROM: NOVEMBER, 1987

**The Power of the Press: Northern European Prints, 1490 - 1700** opens November 14. This exhibition of over 60 prints explores the development of printmaking as a major artistic medium, the beginning of "art publishing", and the many new uses for printmaking developed during the 16th and 17th centuries. Includes 28 prints by Albrecht Dürer, plus engravings, woodcuts and etchings by over 37 Dutch, German, Flemish, Italian, French and British artists. Most of these works have never before been on public display. **Level 3, Mediterranean World.**

**Patterns in Light: The John and Mary Yaremko Glass Collection** continues to January 3, 1988. Over 200 pieces of ornate glass tableware are displayed in this exhibition, a survey of glassmaking from 1870 to 1930. Includes historical illustrations, photographs and a press mould. An elegant dining room with a formal dessert table illustrates how the pieces would have been used in the home.

**Garfield Weston Exhibition Hall.**

Organized and circulated by the Royal Ontario Museum, which acknowledges the generous support of the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture.

**Ontario at Home: 200 Years of Living** continues to January 3, 1988. Six room settings, over 200 artifacts, plus numerous graphics, illustrations, maps and photographs provide a rare glimpse into Ontario homelife from the late 18th to the mid-20th centuries. In the **Garfield Weston Exhibition Hall.**

Ontario at Home is a travelling exhibit produced by the ROM with assistance from the Museum Assistance Programmes of the National Museums of Canada and the Ontario Heritage Foundation, an agency of the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture.

**Grierson Documentary Seminar** starts November 8 and continues to November 13. Established in 1975 to honour John Grierson, founder of the National Film Board of Canada, the Grierson Documentary Seminar gives film and video makers from Canada and abroad the opportunity to screen new works and discuss the latest film industry trends and techniques. For the first time, Toronto plays host to the annual seminar with public screenings in the **ROM Theatre** at 7 p.m. each evening (admission \$4). For registration information, please call 964-1944.

This event is sponsored by the Ontario Film Association.



Goblet and celery vase in the "Grand" or "Diamond Medallion" pattern, ca. 1886-1898, now on display in Patterns in Light: The John and Mary Yaremko Glass Collection.

**Canadian Children's Books - A World to Explore.** On November 14, from 1 to 5 pm, the 11th annual Children's Book Festival will be held at the ROM. Hosted by the Canadian Children's Book Centre, this special event will feature readings by well-known Canadian authors, including Mordecai Richler, Dennis Lee and Dr. Zed, an autograph session with The Kids of De Grassi Street plus colourful displays and hands-on activities.



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# Why did the Vikings leave?

*The Vikings who discovered North America  
more than five hundred years before Columbus  
were certainly less enthusiastic than the  
Spaniards about this find*





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**I**N 1992 the New World will celebrate the 500th anniversary of its “discovery” by Christopher Columbus. Columbus was not the first European to visit the continents beyond the Atlantic; five hundred years before, the medieval Norsemen explored parts of what is now the east coast of Canada, and even attempted to colonize the area.

We know what followed Columbus’s discovery: the Spanish conquest of the native civilizations of Central and South America, European colonization of North America, the decimation of aboriginal peoples by diseases introduced by the newcomers, and the establishment of European settlement across the New World. This meeting of European and American peoples was catastrophic for the latter; by comparison, contacts between native North Americans and the Norse were apparently few and not as disruptive to the natives.

Until about a decade ago, it was assumed that the encounters between the Norse and the natives were not only rare, but probably always hostile. This view was based on the historical Icelandic accounts, which tell of the Norse occupation of Greenland between the late 10th and 15th centuries. There are references to the native peoples of North America in these accounts but the

Robert McGhee

Archaeologists Ralph Pastore and Claude Pinard reconstruct the whale-bone roof of a 12th-century Inuit winter house on Bathurst Island in the Canadian High Arctic. Most of the evidence of contact between the Inuit and the Norse comes from excavation of such houses.





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references are infrequent and vague, and so we must question whether these written records tell the full story. Archaeological work in Arctic Canada and Greenland has increased during the past twenty years, and has produced evidence that suggests that the medieval authors of the Icelandic sagas and chronicles either did not tell all that they knew, or else did not have a complete record of the events that occurred during the first European forays into the New World.

The first accounts of contact with native North Americans appear in two sagas which tell of voyages to the south and west of Greenland during the late 10th and early 11th centuries. After Greenland was colonized, ships travelled regularly to and from the colonies and Iceland. The discovery of eastern Canada probably occurred by chance when one of these ships was blown off course.

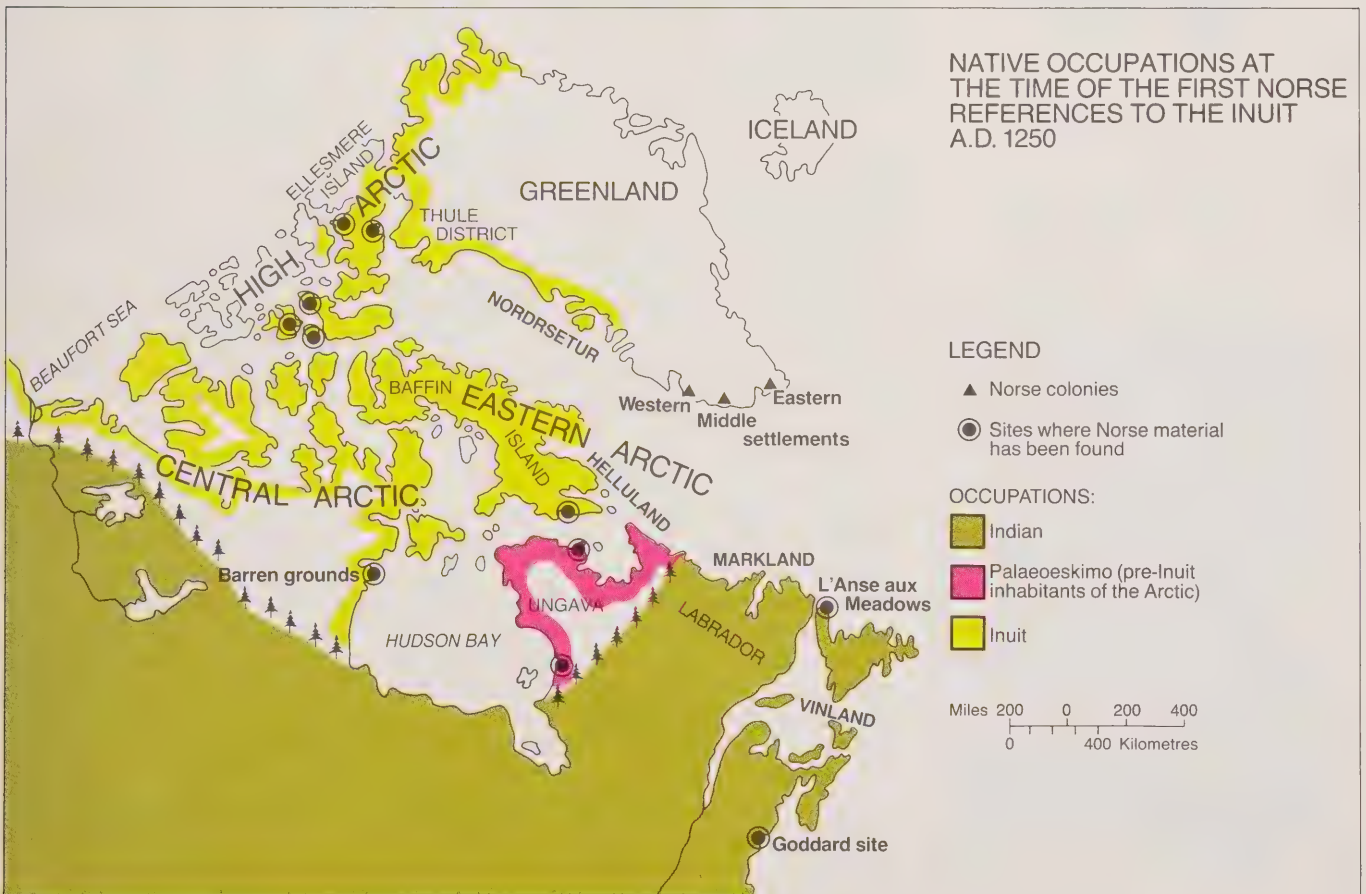
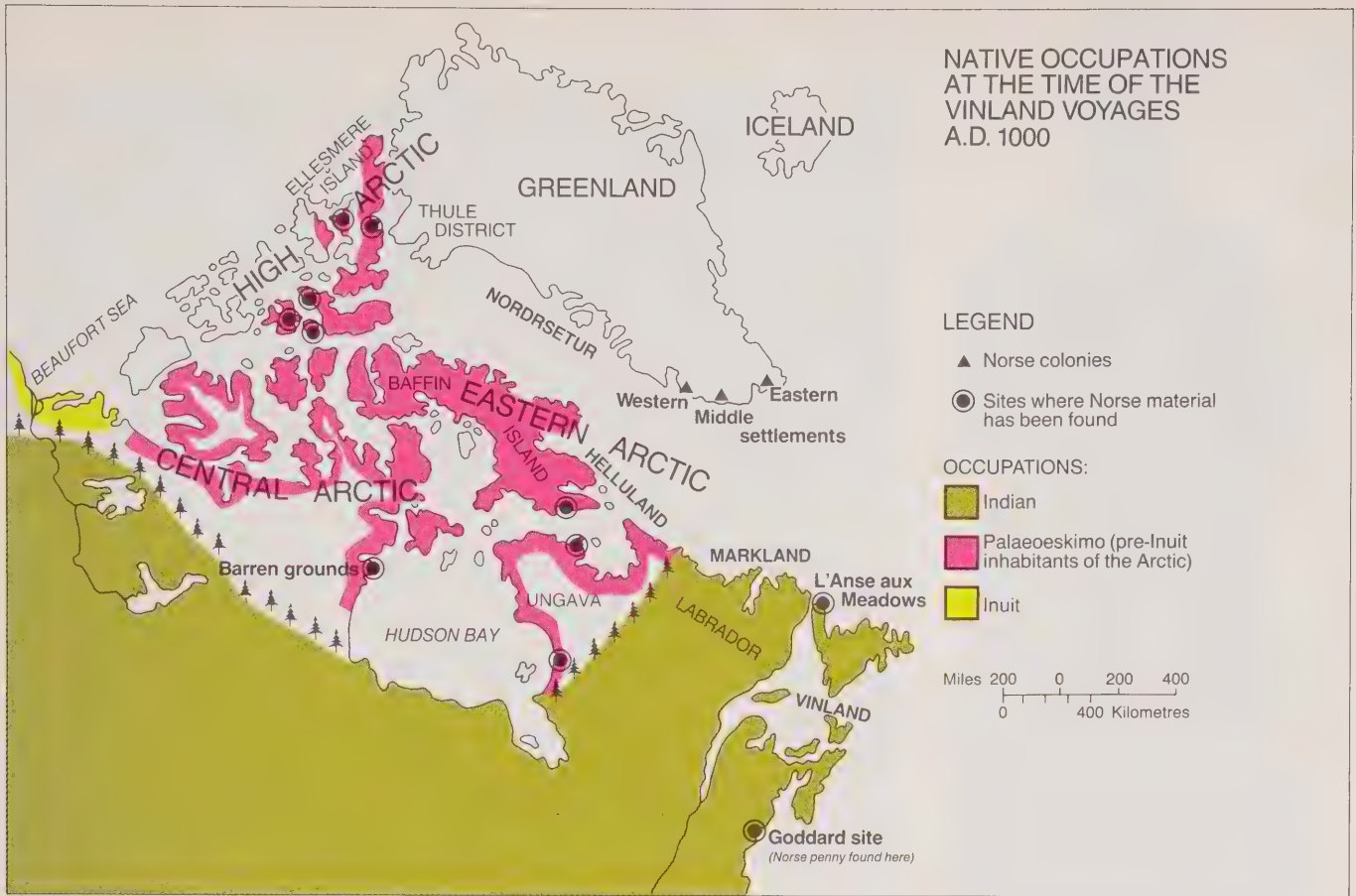
Three newly discovered lands are described in the sagas: Helluland, a barren country with glaciers, probably Baffin Island; Markland, a low forested coast, probably identified with Labrador; and Vinland, a more productive country, which the Norse attempted to settle, and which was probably in the Gulf of St Lawrence region. In both Markland and Vinland the explorers encountered people whom they called *Skraelings*, a word of uncertain etymology; it may have been derived from *Karelian*, referring to the Saami inhabitants of the northern Scandinavian forests, whose appearance and way of life must have appeared similar to that of the natives first encountered in the New World. These Skraelings were almost certainly Indians, the ancestors of the Indians who occupy Atlantic Canada today. Although the sagas tell of the Norsemen trading red cloth for furs, hostilities soon developed.

The Norsemen of the Viking era had no aversion to fighting, and in their skirmishes with the Indians they probably gave as good as they got. Yet their position was considerably different from that of Columbus and of the Spaniards who followed him to the Caribbean. Those who explored Vinland were not warriors or merchant adventurers, nor were they backed by a kingdom bent on territorial expansion and the acquisition of the treasures of the Indies. Rather, the Norse visitors were farmers, seamen, and traders whose home base was Greenland, the most distant, most isolated, harshest, and poorest outpost of European civilization. They simply wished to improve their lots in life.

The Norse ships were certainly capable of crossing the North Atlantic, yet compared to the ships of 16th-century Europe, they were very small and uncomfortable, and they lacked adequate navigation equipment. Vinland must have seemed very distant from the minor comforts of Greenland's farmsteads, and even though its products—timber, furs, and wild grapes—would have made it a more pleasant place to live, the Norsemen did not consider it worth a struggle with an unknown and hostile local population. The Norse knew nothing of gunpowder, an explosive that seems to have had an almost magical effect in similar skirmishes between 16th-century Europeans and native Americans. In fact their weaponry of iron-tipped arrows, spears, and axes can have been only marginally superior to the stone-tipped arrows and lances of the Skraelings. The saga-maker neatly summarized the situation in the words of the first European casualty, who pulled a Skraeling arrow from his body and remarked, "There is fat around my belly! We have won a fine and fruitful country, but will hardly be allowed to enjoy it." In this first encounter between Old and New World peoples, the Indians were the clear winners.

Although there is no evidence that the Norse ever attempted further colonization of North America, there are indications that they continued to make at least occasional visits to eastern Canada. A Norse penny, minted in the late 11th century, has been recovered from an archaeological site on the coast of Maine; on the same site, in the remains of a 12th-century Indian village, artifacts were found that were made of stone from northern Labrador. It is likely that the coin and the artifacts reached the area through trade in the north. An Icelandic chronicle of 1347 mentions a ship from Greenland that had been storm driven to Iceland while on a voyage to Markland. For at least









Above: A wooden doll of Inuit manufacture, found in a 13th-century winter house on southern Baffin Island. It is probably an Inuit representation of a Norseman.

Below: A portion of a bronze trader's balance, found by Patricia Sutherland, in an Inuit site on northwestern Ellesmere Island.



three centuries, the wood-starved inhabitants of Greenland probably made occasional voyages to the forested coasts of Labrador, chopping spruce trees for use in building houses and boats.

By the late 11th or early 12th centuries the Norse must have started to encounter another type of Skraeling: the ancestors of the Inuit. Whereas the Norse records had been vague about encounters with the Indians, the records and the archaeological remains seriously diverge in what they reveal of the relationships of the Norse and the Inuit.

The first Norse mention of the Inuit dates from the year 1266, when a ship sent by the Church to the northwestern coast of Greenland came across traces of Skraeling occupation. The *History of Norway*, dating from about the same time, states that far to the north of the Norse colonies "the hunters have encountered small people whom they call Skraelings; when they are hit their wounds turn white and they do not bleed, but when they die there is no end to their bleeding. They possess no iron, but use walrus tusk for missiles and sharpened stones instead of knives."

Archaeological excavation of early Inuit villages has recently shown that Inuit had settled the eastern Arctic at least a century, and possibly two centuries, earlier than this first mention in the Norse historical records. Interestingly, most of the villages that date to the 11th and 12th centuries have produced small amounts of material that the Inuit must have obtained from the Norse: fragments of chain mail, sheet copper, part of a bronze bowl, iron boat-rivets, and other small pieces of iron that have been refashioned as blades for knives or points for harpoons.

This archaeological indication of early contact between the Norse and the Inuit is supported by one historical record from a rather surprising source. The *Nuzhat al-Mushtāq* is a description of the world written about A.D. 1150 by the respected Arabic geographer al-Idrīsī. The North Atlantic ocean, according to al-Idrīsī, had excellent fish resources and also contained "sea animals of such enormous size that the inhabitants of the inner islands use their bones and vertebrae in place of wood in constructing houses. They also use them for making clubs, darts, lances, knives, seats, ladders and, in general, all things which elsewhere are made from wood."

If the huge sea animals are interpreted as whales, and the "inner islands" as those farthest out into the Atlantic, the description might well refer to ancestral Inuit, who were not only expert whalers but were the only people of the regions surrounding the Atlantic to hunt whales regularly at that time. Their winter houses were framed with the large mandibles and ribs of whales, and whale bone was used as a basic material for many of their tools. Even the reference to ladders may be based on fact; the Inuit neither needed nor built ladders, but sleds of the traditional *komatik* type—two long runners lashed together with a series of cross-slats of wood or whale bone—must have been a common feature of early Inuit villages and could have been easily misinterpreted by a European observer who was familiar with ladders but not with such sleds.

The Norse silence about their early contacts with the Inuit continues into later times. Archaeology now shows that the Inuit had moved into northwestern Greenland by the 12th century, and by at least the 14th century had occupied parts of the southwestern coast in the region of the Norse farms. Yet Norse historical records of the 14th and 15th centuries contain only four brief references to the Inuit. Three of them are accounts of Skraeling attacks on Norse settlements; the fourth reference is a little anecdote about how Björn Einarsson was storm driven to Greenland where he rescued a pair of Skraeling children from an island. The children lived with him for two years until he left Greenland, after which they killed themselves. This story is much like Greenland's traditional Inuit tales of friendship and battles between the Inuit and the Norse.

Archaeological work also indicates that the two peoples lived together in southwestern Greenland for several generations, and that the nature of their relationships must have been more extensive and complex than suggested by





Early Inuit ivory artifacts from the Brooman Point site on Bathurst Island include from left to right: a chain and pin, figurine, pin, and comb.

the Icelandic historical records. Recent excavations of a Norse farm, for example, have recovered a few iron arrowheads of typical Norse form but made from meteoric iron. This material almost certainly came from far northwestern Greenland, and the Norse must have obtained it from the Inuit; this suggests not only that the two groups traded, but that the trade was not simply one of European manufactured goods for native furs.

There are hints that such trade contacts also occurred outside Greenland, perhaps on the eastern islands of Arctic Canada, whose coasts the Norse skirted on their way to the forests of Markland (Labrador). An Inuit winter house dating from the 13th century, excavated on the south coast of Baffin Island, produced a small wooden carving of a human figure. Stylistically, it is typical of Inuit carvings of the period, but the representation is not: the figure is dressed in a long robe or cassock, with a trace of a cross incised on the chest. The carver obviously had seen a European.

Patricia Sutherland, a Canadian archaeologist, recovered a portion of a bronze balance, of the type used by Norse traders, by the ruins of an Inuit structure of about the same period on northwestern Ellesmere Island. Scraps of metal, European hardwood, and even woollen cloth have been recovered from other Inuit sites scattered across the eastern Canadian Arctic. It has even been suggested that the availability of metal attracted the ancestors of the Inuit eastwards from Alaska at about the same time that the Norse were establishing colonies in Greenland. In return, the Norse may have been eager to trade for ivory and animal skins, Greenland's major exports to medieval Europe, which were needed to pay taxes and tithes, and to purchase such necessities of European civilization as grain, church bells, and ecclesiastical vestments.

The Inuit and the Norse must have known of each other, and probably traded with each other at least occasionally, over a period of several centuries. Why, then, were the results of these contacts so slight in comparison with those that followed the contacts between Europeans and American natives a little later? The relative isolation and poverty of the Norse living in Greenland combined with an increasingly cold climate after the 12th century, a greater





The Inuit first discovering the Norse, painted by Aron of Kangek. Collection of the National Museum, Copenhagen.

quantity of sea ice along the North Atlantic sailing routes, and a devaluation of resources from Greenland as new sources of ivory and furs were developed in northern Eurasia, probably led to the decline of European interest in their overseas settlement. The isolation of Greenland did have one benefit; there is no evidence that the serious diseases spreading through Europe at the time reached either the Norse or the Inuit populations.

Norse Greenland was a medieval society in decline, deprived of the social developments, more efficient weaponry, and larger ships that were being developed in Europe. Technologically and socially, neither the Norse nor the Inuit had a conspicuous advantage over the other. Rather than viewing each other as societies of markedly different technological and intellectual accomplishment, we suspect that they shared a mutual contempt. This situation appears to have continued until the total demise of the Norse colonies of Greenland in the late 15th century, at about the time that European exploration once again reached into the northwestern Atlantic.

The Norse colonies eventually disappeared, succumbing to a combination of decades of famine, emigration back to Iceland, and perhaps isolated attacks from the Inuit and from English pirates. To the end, however, they remained resolutely European. There is no evidence to support rumours that some of the Norse "went over to the Skraelings," either by abandoning Christianity and a European lifestyle, or by withdrawing from Greenland in order to settle among the peoples of the Arctic. During the early 20th century, the explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson sought "blond Eskimos" whom he thought could be the descendants of his own Viking ancestors. However, he found no evidence of such an exotic genetic make-up in the people of this area. Claims that the Norse language was spoken by North American native peoples as far apart as Minnesota and Paraguay also have no foundation.

The Norse disappeared from the New World at about the same time that Columbus rediscovered it, and their five centuries of contact and trade left almost no impression on the ways of life of the native peoples of our continent.

*Robert McGhee is an archaeologist with the Canadian Museum of Civilization.*



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# FROM TILE TO TALE

*Fourteen clay tiles at the ROM illustrate some of the two dozen Confucian tales about respect for one's parents*

Catherine Pagani

RESPECT for one's parents is regarded as a basic virtue in western culture. For the cultures of the Far East, respect for one's parents has been perhaps the prime virtue. A popular way to explain this to children in China was by reciting the tales of the twenty-four paragons of filial piety described by Confucius (551–479 B.C.). The children in these tales were exceptionally respectful to their parents and thus served as models for proper filial behaviour according to the tenets of Confucian philosophy and the traditions of Chinese society in general. In a section of the *Xiao Jing* (*The Classic of Filial Piety*), the importance of showing proper respect is described:

Filial piety is the root of all virtue, and that from which all teaching comes . . . Our bodies, in every hair and bit of skin, are received by us from our parents, and we must not venture to injure or scar them. This is the beginning of filial piety. When we have established ourselves in the practice of the Way, so as to make our name famous in future ages and thereby glorify our parents, this is the goal of filial piety. It commences with the service of parents; it proceeds to the service of the ruler; it is completed by the establishment of one's own personality. (Translation by Derek Bodde)

The text continues with the saying that filial piety is "the way of Heaven, the principle of Earth, and the practical duty of man." Filial piety was considered the foundation for all other virtues.

Illustrations of the Confucian tales were sometimes used as decoration although they were not a common subject in Chinese art. One of the more celebrated early examples is a filial piety motif on a woven basket dated to the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. to A.D. 220) that was excavated from the site of Lolang, a Chinese colony in Korea. Around the lip and lid of the basket, the

A Confucian filial piety motif on a woven basket dated to the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. to A.D. 220). The basket was excavated from the site of Lolang, a Chinese colony in Korea.





filial sons are portrayed as seated figures, in rich red, black, and other dark tones of lacquer. Their names are painted beside them. Other famous illustrations of filial piety are seen along the sides of a stone sarcophagus dated to the Northern Wei Dynasty (A.D. 386–535), in the collection of the Nelson Gallery, Kansas City.

Fourteen tiles in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum's Far Eastern Department have filial piety as the theme of their decoration. These were originally part of two larger shipments sent from China by George Crofts in December 1922 and April 1923. Crofts was a fur merchant based in Tianjin and Beijing, where he acquired many important Chinese artifacts for the ROM between 1918 and 1925. His knowledge of and keen interest in oriental collections prompted him to write in December 1922:

Believe the 24 plaques originally existed when Tomb entered but 10 were found broken into fragments and 14 sound and damaged: of these 8 have been sold at \$40: each and the 6 now obtained have been held at \$250: for the last 12 months but without a buyer. The owner is closing his business so we purchased at a loss. Consider these a plum at valuation.

George Crofts could not have anticipated what a plum these tiles truly are. Although crudely fashioned, they are valuable not only because the subject matter is rarely portrayed in Chinese art but because they are in themselves a rare find. There does not appear to be another set of such tiles in any North American or European collections.

The tiles came from North China. From the costumes worn by the figures they can be tentatively dated to the Liao (A.D. 916–1125) or Jin (A.D. 1115–1234) dynasties. The stories of the twenty-four paragons of filial piety were most certainly told as popular tales, and as motifs were used as funerary decoration in the tombs built for deceased members of the upper classes during the Jin Dynasty.

The most interesting and most valuable source in determining the identity of the figures on the Museum's tomb tiles is a 14th-century Chinese book on the tales of the filial children. The text, printed by woodcut, has accompanying illustrations which in some cases look like the ROM tiles. However, even with this kind of help the task of matching tile to tale was not an easy one. George Crofts summed it up exactly in 1923 when he wrote that "a great imagination [is] required to fit in [the] Plaques" with the stories.

The tiles measure approximately 22 cm by 18.5 cm and are made of a hard grey clay. Although they are now unpainted, it is possible that they were painted at one time. The figures representing the stories are in low relief; they stand stiffly against a plain background and are roughly composed with little detail on the face or clothing. However, as crude though they may be, the tiles come alive when linked to the corresponding Confucian tale. Four of the tiles offer particularly vivid illustrations of their stories.

Detail of the engraved, grey limestone side of a stone sarcophagus from the Northern Wei Dynasty (A.D. 386–535), illustrating one of the Confucian tales of filial piety. Collection of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.







Dong Yong, the figure on the left, wears a long tunic sashed at the hip; his hands are clasped in front in a posture of reverence to Chi Nu. Chi Nu, who is facing him, has her hair tied on top of her head and wears a high-waisted gown. She is standing on a cloud, the tail of which gently floats towards heaven. This is the symbol of her other-worldliness.

THE STORY OF DONG YONG CONTAINS AN ELEMENT OF THE SUPERNATURAL such as is common to many Chinese tales. Dong Yong was born about A.D. 200. His family was so poor that to pay for his father's funeral he "sold himself as a bond servant on the loan of ten thousand cash." While he was returning home from the funeral, Dong Yong met a woman who agreed to marry him despite his poverty. She was a dedicated wife, and during their first month together she wove for him three hundred webs of silk, enough for Dong Yong to pay off his debt. She then revealed to him that she was no mortal but was the star Chi Nu, the Weaving Maiden, sent by the Lord of Heaven as a reward for Dong Yong's filial behaviour. After making the announcement she vanished.





THE NEXT STORY IS A TOUCHING TALE OF MENG ZONG, ALSO KNOWN as Gong Shi. Meng Zong was an official of the Qin Dynasty who was completely devoted to his mother. One day in the middle of winter she had a craving for soup made of bamboo shoots. Meng Zong set out for the bamboo grove knowing full well that the shoots would be difficult if not impossible to find in winter. Fortunately the gods took pity on him as he dug into the snow, while weeping over his hopeless task. Where his tears melted the snow, fresh bamboo shoots grew up, which he collected and carried home. Often a bamboo shoot alone or combined with Meng Zong's hat and coat is used to illustrate this story.

Meng Zong is shown sitting on a stool in a bamboo grove. In tears, he covers his face with his hands. A bucket for collecting the shoots rests by his feet.





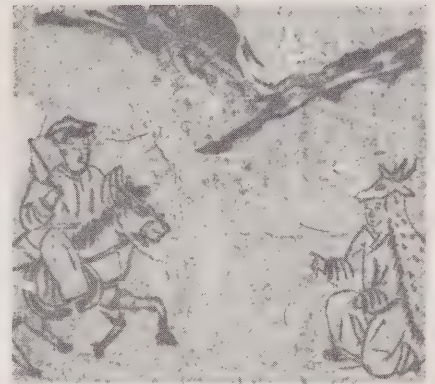
The 14th-century woodcut of Guo Ju and his wife, illustrated above, helped researchers to identify the subject of the tile. On the tile, Guo Ju is shown with both hands gripping the shovel, his right heel resting on the blade as he prepares to dig a hole in which to bury their child.



ANOTHER TALE OF EXCEPTIONAL FILIAL DEVOTION IS THAT OF GUO JU, who lived in the 3rd century A.D. Because he was quite poor, he found that he could barely feed his family, which included his wife, his aged mother, and his children, the youngest of whom was a baby. He decided to bury his infant son so that with one less mouth to feed there would be more food for his mother. While he was sadly digging the grave, he came upon a pot of gold that carried the inscription: "A gift from Heaven to Guo Ju; let none deprive him of it."

There is a more detailed version of the story, which possibly originated from the Qin Dynasty, during the 4th century. Guo Ju, a native of Longlu (or according to others, a native of Wei District in Henei, north of the Yellow River), had two brothers. Guo Ju was very young when his father died. His brothers decided to distribute the family property of twenty million measures of corn between the two of them, leaving nothing to their young brother. Guo Ju stayed at an inn with his mother. He and his wife then worked as servants to support his mother. Some time later, Guo Ju's wife had a baby, a source of great concern for him. He felt that not only would this child interfere with the service to his mother, but also that when the old woman received any food, she would be inclined to share it with the child, thereby depriving herself. As Guo Ju was digging a hole in the forest in which to bury the baby, he found a pot of gold. On the stone lid, written in red, were the words, "This cauldron of gold is granted to you, filial son Guo Ju, for expenditures." Thus Guo Ju became famous throughout the land.





Like the woodcut of Guo Ju and his wife on the preceding page, this 14th-century woodcut helped researchers to identify the tile's subject as Yen Zi. On the tile, Yen Zi has a deerskin draped over his back and holds his hands close to his chest. He pleads for his life before the huntsman astride a lively horse.

THE LAST STORY IS ABOUT FILIAL SON YEN ZI. DURING THE ZHOU Dynasty (c. 1027–256 B.C.), Yen Zi lived with his mother, who was afflicted with an eye disease for which the only remedy was the milk of a deer. Yen Zi disguised himself by wearing the hide of a deer so that he could mingle with a herd in the forest. One day, however, he was discovered by a group of huntsmen who wished to kill him. After Yen Zi told them his story, they were so moved that they let him go free.

結語

Like the story of Cinderella and the fables of Aesop, these and the remaining stories served both to entertain and to admonish children. The figures on the tiles may not be easily identified by those unfamiliar with the stories; but a person pictured sitting beside two isolated stalks of bamboo would have been easily recognized by a 12th-century Chinese child as Meng Zong, searching for fresh shoots in a wintry grove. ❀

*Catherine Pagani is a doctoral candidate at the University of Toronto's Department of East Asian Studies. She is conducting research on the ROM Far Eastern collections.*



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# The value of festive traditions

*Is something missing from  
our celebration of Christmas?*

Carole H. Carpenter

CULTURE is a combination of continuity and change. As human beings we exist in a dynamic equilibrium where on the one hand we respond and adapt to changes that are constantly taking place in the world and in ourselves, and on the other hand we seek out and maintain those things that stay very much the same and give us a sense of stability. In our industrial age, however, we tend to forget the enduring things in the face of rapid transformations, particularly in technology, which long has been a measure of cultural change. In the rush of apparent change we feel that we are losing our grip on something, that we are giving up the tried and true for the new and different. But have we really lost anything or is it just that we need to be reminded of what remains the same in our lives?

Traditions are an important part of cultural continuity because they bring us face-to-face with old, established patterns. When we celebrate any festival, we involve ourselves with the enduring aspects of culture, and so we feel comfortable knowing what to expect and how to perform. Because festive traditions evolve out of strong emotions connected to special events, the repeated celebration of these events as rituals tends to conjure up powerful feelings and remembrances. As a result we have great expectations of traditions, especially that they be identical in real life to what they are in our memories.

Traditions tend to remind us of what we once were—or think we were—and force us to see change in ourselves as well as in the world around us. Since it is difficult to accept change within ourselves, we tend to focus on the world around us and perceive the change as happening there, which contributes to that sense of loss. Because festivals are already so emotionally charged, the sense of loss is particularly felt during their celebration. Consequently joyous occasions frequently become a trial and important events are ignored because their celebration is too traumatic.

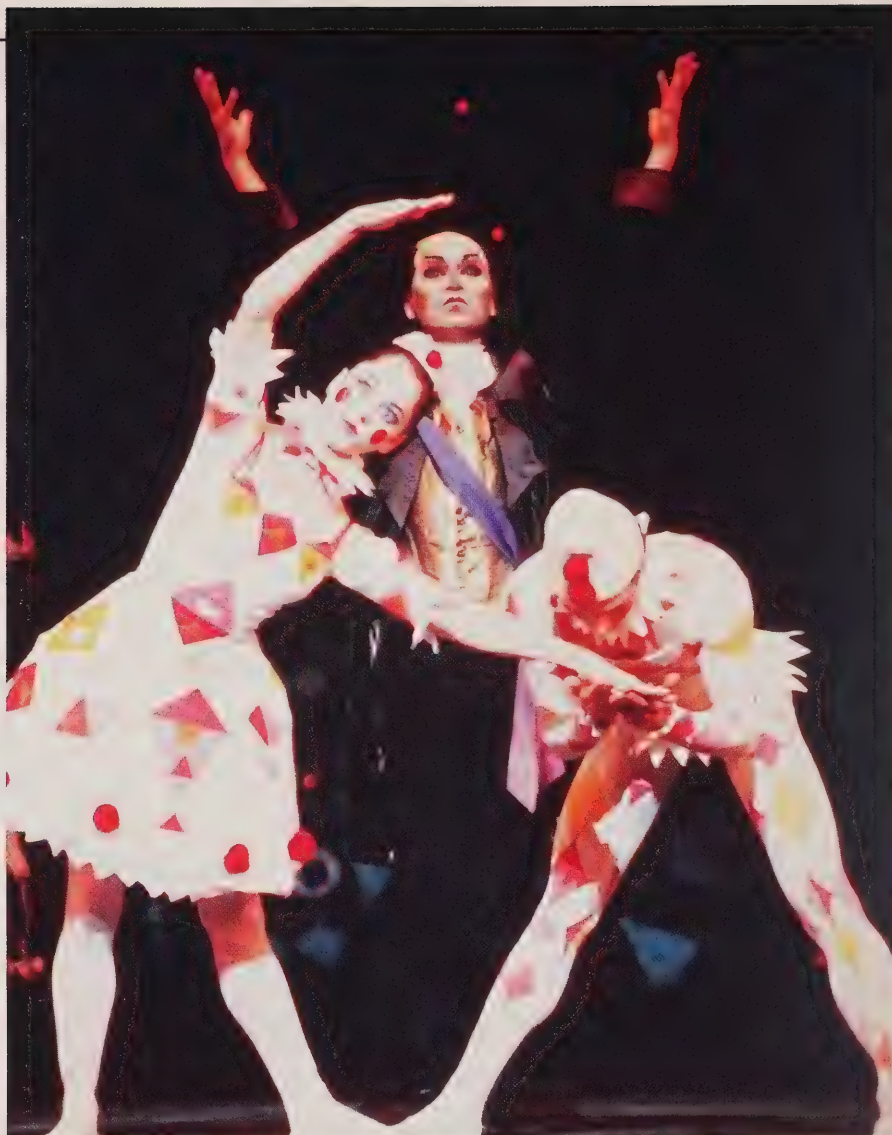
These feelings of cultural loss stem largely from nostalgia. For example, people today commonly believe that in the “good old days” families were stronger, communities more caring, and friendships deeper—all the homey, human values and concerns were more central to existence and, naturally, community and family festivals were more meaningful. We yearn for what we think of as less complicated and less troubled times from which we are irrevocably cut off. However, if we think about what life in years gone by was really like, who among us would give up modern conveniences in order to take much longer to accomplish tasks for the sake of involving the whole family or community?







*The Nutcracker* is one of the most popular ballets to be performed at the Christmas season. From left to right: Martine Lamy, Jacques Garrisson, and Pierre Quinn perform for the National Ballet of Canada.



The past that we treasure is as realistic as a television soap opera: most often it is a golden age rather like the utopias included in mythologies from around the world and throughout history. Mankind, the tales tell us, is forever banished from these Edens because of transgressions or impurities. According to some psychologists we feel ourselves to be likewise banished from our childhood when we attain sexual enlightenment. Although we commonly have nostalgia for childhood, few of us would wish to relinquish our adulthood to return to our lives as they really were when we were children. Such conflict and confusion is part of being human, for people live in a confusing state of cultural imbalance: we sense change as a necessary evil yet we resent it, and we fail to recognize in traditions the ways in which we have remained unchanged.

Since conflict and confusion are particularly evident around festive celebrations, a study of festivals is a good way to learn more about the nature of a culture and the people to whom it belongs. For most Canadians, significant festivals are celebrated in the period from early December to mid-January. Christmas is the most popularly celebrated festival, yet every year as the season approaches there is a lot of talk about how people today have lost the real meaning of Christmas. As a child, I wondered what this elusive meaning might be—just what it was that my family had lost—because the holiday season was, and remains, deeply meaningful to us. It is a time for gathering the family together, for feasting, and for banishing the gloom of winter with bright decorations, laughter, and games.



Popular opinion has it that Christmas is not what it once was somewhere, some time ago, when it was celebrated properly. But is it true that the Christmas festival has changed so much? In fact there are several threads of tradition from quite different sources that over many centuries have become woven into the fabric of our modern Christmas. While the interweaving of several traditions rather than the preservation of a single isolated tradition has brought about much change, over the ages it has also provided a greater sense of continuity and unity to a greater number of people around the world.

Modern celebrations observed by people of various faiths have roots in much older rites, beliefs, and customs, some dating back to prehistoric man. Christmas and Hanukkah, for instance, have much in common with so-called pagan traditions, but their full meaning is not to be found by merely connecting aspects of today's celebrations with those of ancient times in a sort of "missing persons bureau" approach to cultural history.

A whole tradition is obviously more than any one of its separate parts yet there is a tendency when discussing festivals—Christmas in particular—to focus on details, thereby ignoring the real existence of festivals as dynamic, changing events. The criticism that the Christmas festival has lost all significance when the religious aspect is not of prime importance or absent entirely is an example of such thinking. It is true that many people now celebrate a primarily secular rather than sacred holiday (and may feel guilty for it), but it is also true that the Christ-child's birth is only one part of this winter festival and a relatively new addition at that.

Chronologically the first thread of tradition in the Christmas festival is a celebration of light and the life that it makes possible. In the early years of the Christian era, the date of Christ's birth was not firmly set and was celebrated variously in December, January, and March. The choice of 25 December was neither based on irrefutable evidence nor made by chance. The Christian festival commemorating the birth of the Son of God was married to an existing celebration of the birth of the sun god Mithra. Mithraism was the chief rival to Christianity during the Roman Empire until the 4th century, when Emperor Constantine became a Christian. In order to gain converts, the Church pragmatically embraced the Mithraic celebration of the Saturnalia (17–24 December) and transformed it into a Christian festival.

But the roots of the Saturnalia predate the Romans. Throughout recorded history, and doubtless long before, people have made the darkest time of the year a season for sacred and secular festivals. It would not have taken a particularly astute solar observer to note a gradual but steady diminution in daylight and mark the coincident changes in weather, growing things, and fertility. What fear must the decline of the sun have struck in early human hearts. What if it went out entirely? And what joy must the rebirth of light have inspired. Such a cause to celebrate—and so it has remained.

Ancient man evidently made much of the winter solstice in either December or June, depending on the hemisphere. Quite commonly, as the hours of daylight diminished, huge fires were lit to ensure that the light would not vanish completely. This practice was sympathetic magic, based on the idea of like unto like, that is, if sufficient fires were burning then the sun would be kept burning too.

Solstice festivals were usually light-hearted and joyful. The Saturnalia, for instance, was a period of licence when normal rules and restraints did not apply. Masters gave gifts to their slaves and waited upon them; all were equal in abandoning themselves to revelry. *Homo festivus* dominated *Homo sapiens*. The end of the festivities brought a return to order and the beginning of a new year. Many peoples have connected the rebirth of the year with the solstice, and have marked the time by giving gifts and by settling debts in order to begin anew.

A celebration of family is the second thread of tradition woven into the Christmas festival. Among the pre-Christians of northern Europe the winter solstice took on particular importance as well as a more sombre and solemn religious tone with the observance of the Yule festival. The ancient Germanic



RICHARD NOWITZ/CANADIAN JEWISH NEWS

Hanukkah is the Jewish festival of light celebrated near the time of the winter solstice. Here a young child plays with dreidels, special Hanukkah tops, by the light of the menorah, the Hanukkah candelabrum characterized by its nine branches.





*Top:* Here a family celebrates the Yuletide, the Christmas Eve feast following midnight mass, in a rural Canadian home, c. 1880.

*Bottom:* Santa Claus personifies the spirit of giving during the Christmas season.

peoples lived in an animistic world filled with spirits dwelling in all living things. The spirits of the dead had the power to return and did so annually at the solstice in order to pass judgement on their descendants and to bless or curse them for the coming year. Consequently, the living vigorously cleaned and decorated their homes and filled them with greenery that harboured good spirits. Before departing for communal ceremonies, each family placed a large log (the Yule log) on its hearth to welcome the ancestral spirits. A great feast, at which offerings were made to the ancestors, always followed the rituals.

Because of the associations of Christmas with such ancient customs, Puritanism influenced Oliver Cromwell in 1644 to forbid the observance of this festival. Even today some Christian fundamentalists do not celebrate Christ's birth in a very festive way. Within the traditional Church, the festival is considerably less significant than Easter. The folk celebration of Christmas, however, has long outdone the official rites of the Church. The common man adopted the festival, embellished it, and made it his own. This is evident in the third thread of tradition of the Christmas festival: the giving of gifts.

Santa Claus personifies the spirit of giving. The fat, bearded, red-suited soul found in parades and shopping malls, nowadays not long after Hallowe'en, is the latest incarnation of a legendary character renowned and beloved for his generosity and apparently magic powers. What we know of St Nicholas—the patron saint of various countries as well as sailors, thieves, children, and virgins—derives from oral tradition. Born supposedly in Asia Minor of wealthy parents in the 4th century, he gave away his inheritance through gifts to the needy, in one instance throwing gold coins down a chimney to provide dowries for three girls otherwise bound for slavery. After his death, his fame spread as his supposed tomb became a site for pilgrims seeking miraculous cures. The legend of St Nicholas and his servant, Black Peter, travelled with the Spaniards during their conquest of the Low Countries in the 16th century and it became firmly entrenched in Dutch folk tradition. On St Nicholas Eve (6 December), Dutch children still put out wooden shoes to receive presents from the people's saint.



The tradition migrated to America in the 17th century with the Dutch who came to settle what is now New York. The mispronunciation of the Dutch words for St Nicholas created the name Santa Claus. Late in the 19th century Santa Claus became popularized through Clement C. Moore's poem "The Night Before Christmas." Somewhat unfairly Santa almost immediately became associated with the commercial side of Christmas, even though the custom of seasonal gift-giving had been established much earlier.

There is also the religious aspect of the presentation of gifts that is related to the treasures given to the Christ-child by the Three Kings. The Epiphany (6 January), the celebration of the Adoration of the Magi, is the occasion chosen for gift-giving in many countries, especially Catholic nations such as Spain and Italy. Befana, a good-natured witch, comes to Italian homes on the eve of the Epiphany and fills a stocking that has been worn by a good child with sweets and that of a naughty child with coal. However, since Italians are almost constitutionally incapable of seeing bad in children, candy coal is manufactured for Befana to distribute.

Gift-giving during the winter festival season long preceded Santa, yet it achieves its richest expression in him. What magic, what kindness, what

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GREEK AND ROMAN DEPT, ROM  
Pilgrim token illustrating the Adoration of the Magi, c. A.D. 600, eastern Mediterranean, terracotta (clay), 1.77 cm diameter. Collection of the ROM. At the left, the Virgin is seated holding the Christ-child. There is a cross above Christ's head. The Magi are standing to the right and the Star of Bethlehem shines above their heads.

Right: *Madonna and Child*, 15th century, Flemish, attributed to Roger van der Weyden, oil and tempera on panel. Collection of the ROM.



largesse to give to every good boy and girl everywhere. And it is the tradition of giving, rather than getting, that is integral to the *real* Christmas.

The fourth thread of tradition that has been woven into our modern Christmas is the supposedly forgotten element: the Christian observance of the Saviour's birth. While it is undeniable that this aspect of the Christmas celebration is very significant, the festival does not lose importance by the absence of religious belief or devotion. Virtually anyone can accept Christ's message of love, peace, and the brotherhood of all mankind. One may celebrate a secular festival, yet join with the Pope, the Queen, and other leaders who each year underscore the teachings of Jesus by broadcasting prayers for peace on earth and goodwill to all mankind.

Christmas has changed over the ages and continues to do so, which is healthy. Like any other part of culture, it has had to be dynamic and responsive to changing circumstances and demands in order to survive. Not all of the alterations have been negative; rather, they have come about as an intricate intermingling of the sacred and the secular, the official and the popular. There never has been one categorically right way to keep Christmas. Repetition, expectations, and accepted practices combine into traditions which are, after all, only those ways old enough to be considered old. Christmas can be celebrated meaningfully as all or any of a festival of light, a festival of family, a festival of giving, and a festival of peace, love, and fellowship of mankind. For above all, Christmas is a festival, a rejoicing. If we have lost anything, we have perhaps lost sight of our very real need for a season of festival. ☪

Carole Carpenter is an associate professor in the Division of Humanities at York University, Toronto. She is also a folklorist and currently president of the Ontario Folklife Centre.



►The Canadian Decorative Arts Department of the Royal Ontario Museum has recently acquired a large, 19th-century, Canadian silver presentation punch bowl. Fabricated and marked by the Ryrie brothers of Toronto, the bowl is decorated with repoussé fluting, maple and oak leaves, and recumbent beavers. On one side of the bowl an enamel Ontario crest is applied, framed by a wreath of maple leaves. An inscription that reads "Presented To The Honourable Sir George Airey Kirkpatrick — K.C. M.G. PC—Lieutenant Governor of Ontario— 1892–1897—and Lady Kirkpatrick—Toronto— November 1897" is framed by a matching wreath on the opposite side of the bowl.

Sir George Kirkpatrick was born in Kingston, Ontario in 1841, called to the bar in 1865, and elected as M.P. for Frontenac in 1870. After twenty-two years in the House of Commons he was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Ontario in 1892. He died in Toronto in



DEPT OF CANADIAN DECORATIVE ARTS, ROM

December 1899. James and Harry Ryrie, the creators of the bowl, operated their business on Yonge Street in Toronto from about 1880 until sometime after 1900. The identity of the presenter is not inscribed on the bowl, which is

unusual, although the enamel crest suggests an official presentation. We are presently trying to determine whether the bowl was a retirement gift of the Government of Ontario or a private presentation.

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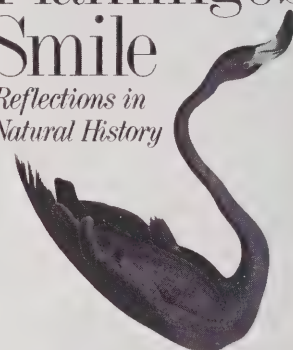
### Hen's Teeth AND Horse's Toes

FURTHER REFLECTIONS IN NATURAL HISTORY  
STEPHEN JAY GOULD



### The Flamingo's Smile

*Reflections in  
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*Reviewed by Desmond Collins, curator  
in the Department of Invertebrate  
Palaeontology, ROM*

In late 1981 on a flight to Toronto from Cincinnati, where we both had attended the Annual Meeting of the Geological Society of America, I asked Stephen Jay Gould whether he ever had difficulty finding suitable subjects for his monthly essays in *Natural History* magazine. Gould responded that, quite the contrary, he kept a notebook for recording ideas for essays as they occurred to



him. His difficulty each month lay in selecting the most appropriate subject from the many listed.

Two volumes of Gould's collected essays have appeared previously: *Ever Since Darwin* and *The Panda's Thumb*. *Hen's Teeth and Horse's Toes* and *The Flamingo's Smile* are volumes three and four, and, as in the first two, nearly all the essays included were previously published in *Natural History*.

Most of the essays deal with evolution and range from the history of evolutionary thought to recent evolutionary developments and descriptions of remarkable life forms. Essays in *Hen's Teeth and Horse's Toes* outline the changes in evolutionary thought up to 1982 (the centennial of Darwin's death) and the atavistic revival of creationism. A recurring theme discussed earlier in *The Panda's Thumb* is that evolution is best illustrated by the less-than-perfect adaptations, rather than by structures with a perfect fit.

Enlivening both volumes are descriptions of marvellous biological oddities such as dwarf male anglerfishes that are permanently attached to females so that their circulatory systems become one. Gould questions the morality of Nature—Are the wasps that paralyze spiders as food for their larvae good because they care for their young, or bad because they give the spiders a slow and lingering death? And what about boobies (birds) that ignore their young if they leave the guano ring of their nest? He also questions our perceptions of Nature. Why do female hyenas appear to have male sex organs? Are zebras white with black stripes or black with white stripes? Gould uses each to make a particular evolutionary point. Other conundrums include clams and plants that change sex when they reach a certain size, female praying mantises having their mates and eating them too, and the strange query: Is the Portuguese man-of-war a colony or an organism?

Gould says that he writes for himself, and the motley crew of scientific thinkers and characters

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who cross his pages certainly confirm this. In *Hen's Teeth* the thinkers are predominantly geologists—Nicolaus Steno of the 17th century, James Hutton of the 18th century, and Baron Georges Cuvier of the 19th century. Gould is less than gentle with Teilhard de Chardin, especially concerning his association with the Piltdown Man fraud. Gould devotes three essays to him. In *Flamingo* the mixture is far more eclectic and the going gets heavy at times. Seminal thinkers discussed range from early theorists such as Pierre Louis Moreau de Maupertuis (preformation or epigenesis in embryology), Charles White (the chain-of-being theory), Jean Baptiste Lamarck (functionalism), Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (structuralism), William Buckland (*Relics of the Flood*), Lorenz Oken and William Swainson (the rule of five), to Philip Henry Gosse (*Omphalos*), Mark Twain, and Casey Stengel.

In *Hen's Teeth* Gould brings his biggest guns to bear on the distortion and misuse of science and statistics to reinforce discrimination and human abuse. He passionately describes the injustice of the use of the United States census of 1840 to justify slavery, the use of I.Q. tests to exclude Jews, Slavs, and Italians from emigrating to the United States early this century, with dire consequences for the Jews, the use of other intelligence tests to justify the sterilization of "feeble-minded" women, and the destruction of Nikolai Vavilov by Trofim Lysenko in Stalin's Russia. Such stories along with others discussing recent manifestations supporting equal time for "scientific creationism" in schools, and the encouragement of larger families for educated couples in Singapore, make uncomfortable reading.

It is with relief that we can turn to the security of the fossil record in both books. One essay describes the effect on mammals of the joining of North and South America, another the discovery of the conodont animal—a long-standing palaeontological mystery—and no fewer than six essays refer to the "cascad-

ing implications" for evolution, and life in general, of catastrophic extinctions at regular twenty-six-million-year intervals through geological time. This is without doubt the most significant observation of the past five years, and its possible effect on evolution is now being widely studied. This regular periodicity in extinctions suggests an extra-terres-

trial cause and so astronomers are now searching for heavenly bodies popularly dubbed "Death Star" and "Nemesis." Gould, perhaps because his own field of palaeontology is pre-eminent in this study, has joined in, calling his last essay "The Cosmic Dance of Siva."

A landmark in *Flamingo* is "Opus 100," Gould's 100th essay, and he



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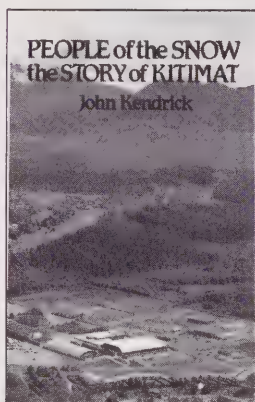
## — BOOK REVIEWS —

indulges himself by describing his own research on the land snail, *Cerion*, in the Bahamas. Other indulgences in the two volumes include essays on the evolution of the Hershey Bar and why baseball players no longer hit .400.

Thus there appears to be something for everyone. As a palaeontologist with a historical bent, I have been particularly pleased by Gould's accounts of early evolutionists. Moreover, because he always uses original sources, it is a convenience to see a modern review of important early books on biological theory. Gould also brings a sense of geological time to his essays, something that is frequently lacking in works by biologists. A good example is his criticism of cladistics, in "A Zebra Trilogy." Gould provides a succinct description of cladistics, pointing out the problems inherent in classifying organisms solely on the basis of branching order, and criticizing the excessive jargon. Both the branching order and the jargon are aspects of the attempt to arrange organisms into an ordered framework, whether the order is there or not.

Even though they cover the same kinds of subjects, there is a distinct difference between the two volumes. Whereas *Hen's Teeth* has many biological vignettes, *Flamingo* has only a few. Instead, the *Flamingo* essays show an increasing preoccupation with the historical development of biological theory. Gould seems to be becoming more of a naturalist philosopher and less of a natural history raconteur.

Gould's writing is consistently vigorous, lucid, and stimulating, even brilliant at times. He says that two rules he tries to follow are never to lie, and to entertain the reader. In most cases he succeeds. Many essays, particularly the biological vignettes and historical pieces, make agreeable bed-time reading. Some of the other essays, especially those on biological theory and the abuse of science, are more thought-provoking than one requires for a good night's rest, and are best reserved for the light of day. ☘

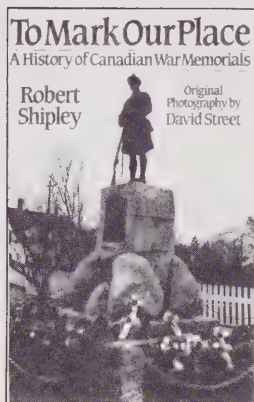


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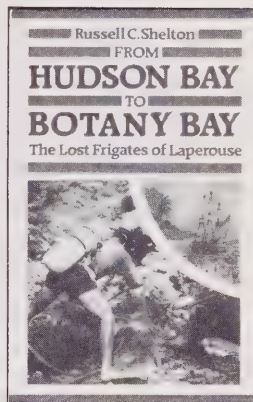


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## A matter of principle



1. The principle of similitude (as it has sometimes been called) states that as the linear dimensions of an object grow, the surface area and the volume increase much faster. If there is a doubling in length, the area increases by a factor of four ( $2^2$ ) and the volume by eight ( $2^3$ ). Why should this be of any significance to the makers of B horror films?

2. Archimedes was so stunned by the discovery of *his* principle that he ran naked through the streets of Syracuse (Sicily, not New York) yelling "Eureka!" What had he discovered?

3. Sir Isaac Newton's greatest work, *Principia Mathematica*, was published exactly three hundred years ago, in 1687. In it he described three laws of motion. One is that a body will persist in a state of motion or rest unless acted on by an outside force. (That's inertia.) The second

law deals with the force that is necessary to overcome that inertia. And the third law has by now entered colloquial speech. What is it?

4. Now that the world's population has passed the five billion mark, it might be worth re-examining Thomas Malthus's principle of population, published in 1798. What was the dire Malthusian prediction?

5. The anthropic principle has become a hot topic among cosmologists in the last decade. If it is true, it will make a lot of the spectacular theories and discoveries about the universe seem a little more predictable. If anthropomorphism means attributing human qualities to divine beings, animals, and things, then what is the anthropic principle?

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## Answers

1. The principle of similitude dictates that you can't have human-sized ants, or lobsters that threaten skyscrapers, or even Jack-and-the-Beanstalk-type giants. If you imagine an ant scaled up to the size of an elephant, you'll recognize that this giant ant's legs would be much thinner than the elephant's. But that would create fatal problems for the ant. If its legs were a hundred times longer, then the cross-sectional area of those legs (the part of the leg that supports the body) would be a hundred squared, or ten thousand times larger. But the ant's weight, which is proportional to the volume, would be a MILLION times greater than normal (one hundred cubed). So those legs, big as they are, would have to support a hundred times as much weight as they do in the regular ant. As this would be impossible, the legs would collapse.

2. The great Archimedes had discovered that the buoyant effect on an object immersed in water depends on the weight of the water displaced. If the volume of water displaced weighs more than the object, the object will float. If it weighs less, the object will sink. The story has it that Archimedes realized this as he lowered himself into a bath-tub and watched the water rise around him. Apparently he was trying to solve a problem posed to him by King Hiero of Syracuse. The king wanted to know if the goldsmith who had made his crown had adulterated the gold with silver. Once Archimedes had the above principle in mind, he determined that equal weights of gold and silver displace different amounts of water, and that the crown displaced a different volume of water than a piece of gold of the same weight. Therefore the crown was *not* pure gold. My only remaining question is, what did Archimedes do when the thrill wore off and he found himself, naked and dripping wet, blocks away from his home?

3. "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." This third law is most obvious in the flight of rockets: the thrust of the burning fuel goes backwards, the rocket forwards. In writing the three laws of motion, Newton established the groundwork for his mathematical description of how things move. This enabled him eventually to describe the world, the planets, and the stars as one huge unified system. Sir Isaac was not noted for his sense of irony or humour, and he would probably be appalled to know that in the late 20th century he would be best remembered by the general public for two things: the apple that he watched fall from the tree, and the third law of motion, which these days is invoked to explain anything from lovers' quarrels to the ups and downs of the stock market.

4. Thomas Malthus's principle was straightforward: population increases geometrically (increasing with a constant ratio between successive quantities, i.e., 1,2,4,8,16,32 . . .), whereas food production can only increase arithmetically (increasing with a constant quantity, i.e., 1,2,3,4,5,6 . . .). Obviously the former rapidly outstrips the latter, and Malthus's original conclusion was that the inevitable result would be that "misery and vice" would limit the population. (In a later edition he added "moral restraint" to misery and vice, realizing that humans didn't necessarily have to reproduce without thinking, like bacteria or fruit flies.) Not surprisingly, two centuries have shown that some of Malthus's assertions—particularly that any increase in income or production immediately leads to an increase in population, wiping out the benefit—have been proven wrong, but it's fascinating to see that even today most discussions of population growth refer to Malthus's work.

5. The anthropic principle in cosmology comes in several forms, but the basic idea is that the universe is not free to take any imaginable form. Because humans are the ones who are studying the universe, the universe must have the qualities necessary to make our existence possible, otherwise we wouldn't be here.

It's not a matter of chance, for instance, that the age of the universe is several billion years, anywhere from ten to eighteen by current reckoning. Why is this so? There must have been enough time to produce us, the very beings who are determining the age. We are built primarily of carbon atoms, and it takes billions of years to make and distribute carbon through space in an endless cycle of births and deaths of stars. So we couldn't discover that the universe was only two or three billion years old, because many more billions of years were needed before there was enough carbon made and distributed. Another example: if the strength of the force of gravity were a little larger than it is, all stars would probably be blue giants (as distinct from the medium-size, medium-brightness sun that we have), and blue giants probably don't have planets. So we could never discover a different value for  $G$ , the gravitational constant. These examples support what is known as the weak anthropic principle (WAP). The strong anthropic principle (SAP) goes further: it says that if the universe were even slightly different from what it is, life wouldn't exist at all. And then some sceptics have created their own versions, like TRAP, the totally ridiculous anthropic principle, and even the completely ridiculous anthropic principle.





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